

DEVELOPING A SMALL GROUPS DISCIPLESHIP  
MINISTRY MODEL FOR THE MARVIN  
AME ZION CHURCH

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEVELOPING A MINISTRY MODEL FOR DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH SMALL GROUPS AT THE MARVIN AME ZION CHURCH**

by

Haven O. Anderson

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This Ministry Model was created to address the need for discipleship training by using small groups at The Marvin AME Zion Church. Through this project a volunteer group of members participated in a six week course on Discipleship Training. The classes were presented in conjunction with a four part sermon series designed to increase member's awareness of its importance. The project was measured by pre and post surveys, and participant feedback. The writer concluded that if members are brought together through small groups and taught the principles of Discipleship, then they will increase their understanding of the topic and be equipped to train others in the congregation.

## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God be praised for allowing me to see this dissertation finally completed. I knew very early in my ministry that the call to prepare was an ongoing call. This process has been the most challenging thing I have ever undertaken. I have come face to face with memories and issues that I could no longer suppress. My Doctor of Ministry experience has given me a quiet courage to confront and deal with areas of my life that I have carried since my childhood. For that reason among many I am eternally grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge my mentors Dr. J. Elvin Sadler and Dr. T. Anthony Spearman. You both have been mentors in my life and ministry long before I became a part of the UTS family. Thank you both for pouring into me and giving me access to your spiritual gifts. Thank you even more for never giving up on me.

To Dr. Ernest Jeffries, my brother and dear friend, thank you sincerely for all your support. You've been so helpful to me during this process. I am indebted to you.

To the Marvin AME Zion Church family, I am truly grateful and very thankful to you for receiving this project and helping me accomplish this very important personal goal. I am also grateful that you have supported me as your pastor for the last five years.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate the completion of this dissertation to my family. My father the late Sammie Anderson Jr., my mother Mrs. Queen E. Anderson, my Sisters, Inger and Yamani, my Father and Mother In-Law, Calvin and Linda Bennett, and of course my Sister in law Aprill, I love you all.

I especially want to dedicate this to my wife Quanda. You are the person in this world who knows me best. Thank you babe for taking this journey with me, there are no words to express how much your love has meant to me. God blessed me when you came into my life..

## INTRODUCTION

This ministry model was contextually set at the Marvin AME Zion Church in Waxhaw, North Carolina. It has been given the title *Marvin Discipleship Model*. The model was Created and designed to measure the change in attitudes of participants at Marvin towards the area of discipleship after having completed the four week training model.

In Chapter 1 the writer described the importance of this ministry model and why it was needed. In this chapter the writer also addresses the challenges that were found in the ministry context. The reader is made aware of the direct link between the issues discovered in the Marvin AME Zion church specifically the absence of any type of discipleship training, and the challenges the writer experienced during his own childhood when he was in need of spiritual guidance and direction. It was the similarities between these issues that led to the discovery of a point of synergy between context and writer. These variables worked together in aiding the writer to establish this ministry model.

In Chapter 2 the writer discusses current literature relevant to small group discipleship training; the literary research is compiled and presented in three categories. Category one small groups, Category two, discipleship, and Category three spiritual maturity.

In Chapter 3 the writer examines the Theoretical significance of this ministry model. The writer documented Theological, Historical, and Biblical perspectives, and described the project and the merit of receiving it as a form of Practical Theology.

In Chapter four, the design and methodology of the Marvin discipleship model is revealed. The project's primary focus was to collect data and information from the members of the congregation and to measure their receptiveness towards a ministry emphasizing discipleship. The information gathered and analyzed from the Training classes and Sermon Series is shared in detail as a part of this chapter.

Chapter five provides a step-by-step description of what actually took place during the creation, implementation and review of the ministry model. The writer provides specific details involving the member's responses to the information that was shared via training workshops and feedback from Sermon series..

In Chapter 6 the writer will look back on the ministry model and the experience of developing the seminars, workshops, the creation of the sermon series, the responses from the members of the congregation who took part in the surveys and in closing provide recommendations as to how the model can be presented and improved upon for implementation in different contextual ministry settings.

## **Chapter One**

### **Ministry Focus**

As the writer looks at his life he acknowledges humbly that God has blessed him tremendously. As he stands today, Haven O. Anderson is blessed to be a husband, pastor, spiritual father to several ministers and is surrounded by a loving family. He is married to Quanda Bennett Anderson, a beautiful, loving and wonderful wife. He is the very proud pastor of the Marvin African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, a fast growing exciting church located in Waxhaw, North Carolina. He has several sons and daughters in the ministry. They all are preachers and pastors who in their own right are great men and women of God.

When the writer stops to think about how far he has come, he is humbled. He realizes that he has been a part of an amazing journey. One that has helped him to grow from a young child full of laughter, and innocence into a youth who experienced challenges that he had avoided ever talking about or sharing with anyone until he undertook the process of completing his Doctor of Ministry Project and writing his spiritual autobiography.,

This chapter will provide the reader with important background information about the writer and the local context of the project. The writer, Haven O. Anderson will share a brief autobiographical sketch of his life at different stages of his development, ranging from early childhood through his current role as Husband and Pastor. The reader will also learn about the Marvin AME Zion Church which is the local context of the project. The chapter concludes with identifying a synergistic point between context and writer.

His earliest memory of small group activity and instruction was being enrolled by his mother at the age of four into nursery/kindergarten at First Presbyterian church in downtown Charlotte. She also signed him up for swimming classes at the nearby YWCA at the same time. Both were located a few blocks from her job. They were small groups set in the form of classes, and while the activities seemed very different in their nature, upon closer inspection they involved similar objectives.

- Instruction from a teacher/coach, which provided goals and objectives for the class,
- A safe environment to learn in.
- Adult monitored interaction with peer members of the group to gauge social interaction,
- Listening skills,
- Ability to Comprehend and follow instructions,
- Personal evaluation which involved some level of examination to determine if all goals had been achieved.

As early as these memories are, there is another group setting that has been constant throughout his life since early childhood; it is now and remains one of his most valued group relationships. That is his relationship with the Church. It is the most fulfilling, complex, confusing, rewarding, disappointing, loving, draining, and necessary relationships that he holds. At times the Church and God are synonymous to him.

As a member of Tabernacle's first year Sunday school class for first grade children at Tabernacle Baptist Church, the writer remembers being taught by a very loving, gentle teacher who rewarded good behavior in her class by providing special recognition. What

has endeared this teacher to his memory is that she represented to him, the church and God at this stage of his life.

As the Church, the teacher taught him lessons and stories from the bible, and she did so with a care that made him want to be in her presence as often as he could. She made the writer feel as if he mattered, that in that classroom, whenever they were together, he was loved. The teacher represented God's assigned mentor for that season charged with helping him to grow. The growth and class lessons he received from this class involved a Godly love component. The writer would learn later that some lessons are needed but there would be no Tabernacle Baptist First Year class to teach them, or to hold his hand through them, or to hug him or to tell him what he wanted to hear. No there were some lessons that he experienced that involved pain, sorrow, grief, hurt, betrayal, depression, disappointment and even abandonment. These lessons hurt, but were necessary, the writer needed to learn them and the power of God's love to save him and to show him how to use the lessons for his own growth and God's glory.

At a family cookout, the writer sat with absolutely no memory of this recounted event, but listened intently as his mother shared with his wife, how as a very young child, she would watch as the writer as he and his younger sister would rush to the chancel rail after Sunday morning service concluded, and ask the Pastor, questions every Sunday about his sermon, and apparently why he felt the need to shout at the congregation when he preached. His mother laughed as she told the story, but admits she was embarrassed at the time. She said that she apologized to the pastor every week for the forwardness of her children, but she said the Pastor, would burst into laughter, and assured her that it was alright and that he looked forward to his time with both children.

The writer finds it very interesting, that as a Pastor, he now greets every member following the morning service and will not leave to go to his office after church until he has spoken to any member who wishes to speak to him. How much of this came from his observing The Pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church? Did his time and attention as the Pastor have an impression on the writer?

One memory of the Minister that the writer does recall was him using he and another boy as an example during one of his sermons. The writer had gotten into a fight with a boy from the church, outside in the parking lot, when they both should have been in Sunday school. He doesn't remember the reason for the fight just that they fought. Someone at some point apparently told the Pastor about the incident, and while he did not talk to him or the other boy at the time, somehow the altercation made it into his sermon that day. The Minister used his knowledge of the events but changed the names to protect the guilty. The writer remembered how it felt that day hearing The Minister talk about how people sometimes do things that they later regret, and that God wants people to walk in forgiveness.

There is no doubt in the writer's mind that his Pastor had an impact on him. As the leader of the small group which was the church, he taught and preached to the entire congregation, but also gave personal attention to members within the group which the writer personally benefitted from, and even emulates himself as a Pastor today. The writer constantly preaches on the subject of redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation and most of all love. All lessons, he has personally experienced.

Junior high was a different world. It was like starting all over again. The writer left elementary school and his naivety about the transition was a blessing and a curse. A blessing because he didn't seem to stress about any of it before the first day of school. A curse because he felt like a lamb being led into the midst of wolves. The week before seventh grade began his mother put he and his two sisters in the car like she had done every year at the same time, and took them shopping for new school clothes. The first day of school In Junior High, the writer learned that the stakes of social acceptance had just been heightened beyond anything he had anticipated. Social classes had emerged in this new culture and it appeared he was going to be a casualty of the social wars and it was only the first day. All of his friends entering the seventh grade had done the same thing. They wore brand new clothes on the first day of school in Junior High. This apparently was something only little kids did or so we heard. They were all laughed at and ridiculed by eighth and ninth grade upper classmen for what seemed like all day. In retrospect it really was just the bus ride to and from school. While he knew some of the older kids from his neighborhood, everything seemed different now. The writer can laugh about it now, but keep in mind thirty three years ago in 1980, it all seemed so serious and important.

His coping mechanism was to somehow find a way to belong and fit in. He didn't want to be an outsider. He didn't mind attention but just not that kind. Sports became his vessel to be accepted at Ranson Junior High, more specifically football, and track.

These teams provided the value that small groups are capable of bringing to those who take part in them; they allowed the writer to connect with others, to become a part of something important, something special. It allowed the group to work toward a common

purpose with team mates whose goal was to have a winning season. From one small group to another the goals and objectives may be different, and that is to be expected.

What is abundantly clear about small groups team approach, is that there is value in a group no matter how big or small coming together leveraging their strengths and resources contained within the group and using all of their strengths, resources, time and talents to achieve their goal. As a member of a group, people are expected to pull their own weight and do their part, but they don't have to worry about doing everything alone. A group is there to help it's members, and the members are there to help the group shoulder the burden.

The year was 1982, and the writer was a High School Sophomore. Once again change brought a major adjustment moving on from Junior High School. With some recollection of his last major transition three years earlier, the writer took the change in stride. Football practice had begun prior to the official opening of school, and this time there was no taunting, or hazing as the new underclassmen. Sports once again had been his small group of choice that allowed him to navigate the winds of change.

1985 High School was a pleasant memory, graduation had come and gone, and college lie ahead. Moving away from home to attend Winston Salem State University was an amazing experience. His sophomore year he became an R.A. residence assistant in Bickett Hall. Small groups such as Student Government, and Greek Fraternity life became groups he pursued and successfully gained admittance into.

The writer attended Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church for his entire time in Winston Salem. The Pastor was a dynamic preacher, and the church was unlike anything

he had ever been to before. Every Sunday the church was packed full of members and Students from the college. He was drawn to his sermons, hanging on his every word. The transparency and honesty of the messages were refreshing. The writer admired the way he seemed to completely give over to the preaching experience. Hearing the Pastor preach each Sunday actually made him feel encouraged and hopeful. Church had not felt like this back home. His childhood Pastor had gone through a very vicious church fight, and was voted out by the church. He left and started a new church. The writer's Grandfather was also an assistant Pastor at his home church, and he received a call and was installed as the new Pastor of a different Church. After seeing the bickering and arguing, and the mean spirited behavior of the members, the writer had been exposed to more than he wanted to see. He did not like that side of church life, The Pastor during his youth was gone, His Grandfather was gone, taking many of his family members with him, aunts, and cousins that left to support him in his new church, but there were no youth in the new church, the congregation was elderly. The writer instead started attending his Father's home church in York, South Carolina, Mt. Harmony United Methodist Church, along with his immediate family. His Father's side of the family is very large, and they constituted a majority of the church membership. As much as he felt comfortable in the environment at Mt. Harmony because of his family, truthfully he was not engaged in personal spiritual development. This part of his life was awakened in college and by the pastor of the church he attended in Winston Salem, and sermons and the worship experience on Sundays produced a hunger for the word that he didn't remember having before. The writer was becoming aware of his own need to be trained and discipled to grow in his spiritual life.

Pledging Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity incorporated in the spring of 1986 his sophomore year was a challenging but rewarding experience. His interest in this fraternity came about once he discovered that his idol, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a member. As a child, the writer grew up listening to his speeches, his sermons and learning about his life and his call. When he got to college, he was impressed at how many Alpha brothers were leaders in student government and active on campus with noteworthy causes.

One of the darkest chapters of his life began with a phone call from his Mother while he was in college. She called to tell him that his father had become ill and it was serious enough to take him to the Hospital. In all of his life, the writer could not remember his father ever being sick. Not even a common cold. He knew as his mother talked to him that something wasn't right. He hung up the phone and knelt down beside his bed, and began to beg God not to take him away from him. The writer began to cry, worrying that this terrible news meant that his father had some condition that he might not recover from. His girlfriend at the time Quanda Bennett, who years later would eventually become his wife, had driven up from Charlotte to see him. She came into the room and saw him there with his face buried in his hands, and she knelt down beside him and started praying for him and for his father. The writer couldn't speak, he was scared. His mind was filled with all kinds of thoughts, but Quanda just stayed with him until he could get himself together. It was during this moment in his life that the writer began to believe that Quanda was meant to be more than just a girlfriend.

During the writer's years of working in corporate America, he became more involved with the small groups and teams from the perspective of one charged with helping to plan, prepare, and direct the establishment of goals and directives.

These small groups gave the writer a safe environment and built in relationships that allowed him to explore important values such as trust, teamwork, learning, common goal setting, friendship and community well being.

Certain unfortunate experiences in his early life caused the writer to experience a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and to constantly struggle with unhappiness. It is perhaps these feelings that cause the writer to yearn and search out settings and small groups that would provide opportunities to counter his own insecurities by helping others to achieve success in their lives. The writer was trying to live vicariously through the experiences of others within these groups as a way to counter his own challenges of self doubt. The writer felt good when he helped others to achieve success and meet goals that they wanted to reach.

The writer began his ministry as a member of the Jonahville AME Zion Church where he preached his trial sermon on December 4, 1994. His sermon text came from I Corinthians 13. He was ordained a Deacon in 1998 and an Elder in 2000.

#### Education and Seminary Years

Master of Divinity 2009, Doctor of Ministry 2013

Pastoral Appointments 1999-Current

September 1999 Parker Chapel AME Zion

November 2000 Cedar Grove Cabarrus

June 2004 Bethel AME Zion

Jan 2008 Marvin AME Zion to present

As he pauses to survey his life, these memories have allowed him to see just how far back his relationship with the church extends. It is one of the deepest roots of his life's tree, and seems as if it's strands wrap around his life and are interwoven with the chords of family, faith, and his deep desire to love and be loved by God. Without the Church the writer doesn't know if he would have had an outlet to explore his relationship with God, and who he was born to be. Without the church who would Haven O. Anderson be today? This relationship as near and dear to the writer as it is, still leaves the question, why was there no spiritual maturing, and developing occurring?

### **Marvin AME Zion Church, the local context**

On Sunday, January 6, 2008, the writer received a mid-year pastoral appointment change and was transferred to the Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church in Waxhaw, North Carolina, by then Presiding Prelate, and Bishop. When the writer began his tenure as pastor of this church, and thus his connection with this context he found a group of people who were spiritually and emotionally divided. Some members appeared to be extremely happy that the previous Pastor was no longer assigned to the work, and that there had been a new Pastor assigned. Yet others appeared to be hurt, and did not understand why there had been a Pastoral change. The writer learned during this period that many members were not aware that the context was a part of an itinerant system. With Pastor's only assigned one year at a time. Several people left the church and did not return during the first three months. Others, who had left the church prior to the writer's appointment and arrival, had returned and appeared to be ready to resume their

membership. Also during this time Marvin began to experience rapid growth from people who were new residents to the community and were looking to establish roots and unite with a local congregation.

On his first day reporting to Marvin AME Zion church as their newly appointed Pastor, the first Sunday in January of 2008, the writer was met by the Preacher's Steward, who escorted him on a drive around the Community and talked to him about the history of the Church the founding families and the town of Waxhaw.

With great pride he shared that "Marvin was the oldest Black Church in town. The writer discovered through the history records maintained at the Church, that Marvin AME Zion was 112 years old, having been founded in 1901, by the Ross, Houston, Vinson, and Ardrey Families. Lifetime residents of the Marvin Township, who are also members of Marvin AME Zion church, describe the church in its current location as once having been farm land and cow pasture, and now the residence of homes advertising a selling price ranging from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.00 in one nearby subdivision named Providence Downs. With the property values that have changed so drastically in the past twenty years, these Locals have also observed a difference in the type of people who have moved into the area.

Marvin Township has gone through significant changes over the last twenty years. The community has a very large segment of it's population who have moved to the area, from other parts of the country. Marvin AME Zion has a membership of 780 with 65% female and 35% male. The age breakdown is as follows:

**21-35 = 20%**

**36-55 = 45%**

**56-70 = 35%**

The congregation is primarily family based with the adult age range made up of members from age 21 to age 89, with approximately 250 of our membership being children under the age of 18 years old. The largest segment of Marvin's membership is between the ages of 35 and 55 with a significant number of this group classified as married. This necessitates the need to minister to the members with sensitivity to family and couples' needs at the forefront of any approach to ministry volunteerism.

In 2008 when the writer arrived at Marvin, the membership was just under 400. Sunday attendance between two services was approximately 250 people per the weekly attendance sheets provided by the Ushers who counted worshippers at each service weekly. Estimating 100 persons at 8am service, and the remaining approximately 150, attending the 11am service. In the last five years the increase in membership has been between 350 and 400 people. This has been both cause for celebration, and concern at the same time; Excited because the church continues to grow numerically. Concerned because with a church growing this fast, it is important to have an infrastructure that can accommodate the needs of a church this size.

Listed below are some of the challenges that the church has experienced in some form.

### **No Discipleship Model**

The members of the church are present in large numbers on Sunday, but at other times during the week, when instruction is taking place, there appears to be an apathy when it comes to the majority of our members and their involvement in being trained for

service. This is seen monthly during evangelism meetings, bible studies, and even lay council meetings. Average attendance at these meetings is less than one percent of the aggregate membership numbers. There seems to be no correlation between spiritual growth, personal development, and christian responsibility to serve as a part of one's reasonable service.

### **The lack of training for new members leading to spiritual growth**

Most of the leaders in the church previously have been persons who were descendants of the founding families. Marvin has never participated in any type of ongoing leadership preparation. Because there was no training, there never seemed to be a consistent plan to move the church forward with new people who possessed different skill sets. There was no real plan of succession. People kept offices until they were tired of serving, or could no longer serve for other reasons.

### **The church still operates with a family church mindset**

Certain families have been in control of the Marvin church since its origins. The representatives of those families are now a small group but they are attempting to maintain their presence and standing in the church. As the church is continuing to grow, their influence is declining. This fact coupled with subsequent generations do not have a desire to have positions passed down to them is now creating a gap that is being filled with new members out of necessity.

**The overall church does not currently embrace a teaching model.**

Through the years, the church had not had Pastors that taught members the significance of pursuing some line of personal theological perspective. All of the members would consider themselves believers, but most of them had not been involved in any type of ongoing training or study of personal development. There was a period where there were very large numbers of members who came to Bible study when the church participated in preparing family meals, but the concern became later that people were coming for the meal, and not for the teaching, or training. Once the meals were no longer offered on the night of bible study, the crowds departed and did not return.

During the past five years, the writer through prayer and the faithfulness of God has begun to see some of these areas make positive changes. Marvin is reaching out to the surrounding community and finding ways through ministry opportunities to make a difference to its neighbors, and its members both old and new. There is a growing effort to equip the membership with sound biblical teaching, social enlightenment through education, leadership development, and strengthened relationships through embracing discipleship.

Members who have joined Marvin in the last 5 years have come to the church with abilities, skills, and talents that can enhance the church's opportunity to improve. New people are joining with new gifts. These new gifts have improved the churches strength in handling certain aspects of church life. Through the use of small groups, like minded members, and people with similar interest, gifts, and skills are able to find one another and serve as a resource for the church.

### **The writer's journey and context issues synergized**

The need for discipleship training as a means of personal spiritual development will enhance the visible lack of teaching and instruction taking place at Marvin AME Zion. The use of small groups and teams is not a new concept to the AME Zion Church. A similar principle and strategy is employed through our class leader system. With thoughtful care and consideration, this principal can be used to help improve the churches receptivity to the teaching of discipleship and promoting it as an area of focus for the church. The writer's own life and his chronicled experiences with small groups and teams give evidence of his support of their use as a tool for development and learning.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The purpose of the *Small Group Discipleship Model* was to create an environment within the Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church that focused on developing spiritual growth and maturity through the use of small groups. This discipleship project embraces the concept that small groups can be used as a method to encourage one to strengthen their personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This chapter will discuss literature that supports the *small group discipleship* model. The writer's research emphasizes the impact of small groups on the development of one's relationship with God, the attributes of God, God and the community and in reproducing other disciples for the kingdom. The literature review will be divided into the following categories; *small groups, discipleship and spiritual growth and maturity*. The literary review will now begin with a discussion of small groups.

#### **Small Groups**

According to Gareth Icenogle, the first definition of a small group can be characterized by the attributes of GOD.<sup>1</sup> Icenogle writes; the original small group in the Garden of Eden may be reflections of the divine small group Christians have historically called the Trinity. The Trinity of God beckons to the trinity of humanity, and Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup>Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

is the pivotal person in both triangular (circular) paradigms of community. The triangle, as the microcosm and smallest group of divine and human community, expands into a circle as more and more persons are added to the community.<sup>2</sup>

Icenogle also states, it may be overly dramatic to say that God lives as a *small group*, but the church has historically described God as Trinity, three persons in one. In any case, the creation account presents both divinity and humanity as *communities* of being and action.<sup>3</sup>

According to some authors, in particular Icenogle, the small group is a generic form of human community that is trans-cultural, trans-generational and even transcendent. The call to human gathering in groups is a God-created (ontological) and God-directed (teleological) ministry, birthed out of the very nature and purpose of God's being. God as a being exists in community. Humanity as the imaged beings of God was created in community and is called to live and mature in community. The natural and simple demonstration of God's communal image for humanity is the gathering of a small group.<sup>4</sup>

These communities are the forerunners of what we know as small groups today. As it was then there exists now an opportunity within the church to bring together the divinity of God and the humanity of man working together in concert.

According to Jimmy Long in the 21st century, mankind is experiencing a cultural shift which could be as dramatic as the shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

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<sup>2</sup> Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981)

<sup>4</sup> (Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 1993.)

Although it is sometimes difficult to identify because it is happening slowly over an extended period of time, the church needs to try to understand the changes and adjust its ministries to meet the needs of its membership. Small groups have a major part in outreach and discipleship in reaching the current generation of Christians.<sup>5</sup>

Icenogle contends that Scripture was written out of, to and for human community. Humanity naturally gravitates to grouping, and Scripture naturally points to the need for healthy human groups, large and small. The small group is the rudimentary and simple version of the more complex human community called forth by God.<sup>6</sup>

There is literary evidence supporting the significance of small groups as it relates to creating disciples and encouraging discipleship. Small Groups if implemented correctly should be engaging and promote healthy growth within members overall, thus strengthening relationships in their families, church and the world. According to Arnold and Black, “once the church has formed its small family-like groups of partners-in-discipleship, people begin to know themselves and others better. They move past surface conversation and the preliminary fears of opening themselves up to others, and they begin to experience real fellowship. While weekly worship services and “fellowship hour” are undeniably important, they alone cannot provide the depth that is necessary for believers to take root and grow spiritually”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jimmy Long, *Small Group Leaders' Handbook: The Next Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> (Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Arnold and Stephanie Black, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

There are some key components that an effective small disciple group should have that date back to the life of the early church and are vital in creating a vibrant and healthy Christian life: “nurture, worship, community and mission”.<sup>8</sup> All small group discipleship models should glean some if not all of the attributes mentioned as traits for effective groups. Unfortunately because of the diversity of individuals involved, their gifting and various tasks to be performed in the church setting, some small groups will emphasize one particular element, while other groups will emphasize others.<sup>9</sup> According to Barker, small groups that model all four characteristics; nurture, worship, community and mission has been proven to provide the most balanced growth among its participants. Small groups focused on *whole* Christian living help's to keep the member in balance. Barker states Christ is Lord of all areas of our life and these types of groups demonstrate that reality.

God is the focus in this section, not small groups. However, small groups are the vehicle for humanity to carry out God's will in everyday life. No matter how much “rugged individualism” one might have, the individualist will eventually find herself or himself in a small group working through the issues and opportunities of life growing spiritually and working to produce other disciples for the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Barker, *Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>10</sup> (Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 1993).

## Discipleship

As Marvin A.M.E Zion church integrates current ministries with the needs of its members, the church must also respond to the biblical mandate set by Jesus in Matthew's gospel to "go and make disciples and to teach them those things that Christ had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)". This directive given by Christ is a call to discipleship, to his disciples and to all who would become disciples under their teaching. These relationships of small groups making disciples exist even today.

Jimmy Longs "*Small Group Leaders Handbook: The Next Generation*" gives insight into strategies that use small groups to promote discipleship on college campuses. Long's use of small groups as a discipleship method on college campuses provides an example of how small groups can be used in various settings. Churches such as Marvin would benefit from a successful discipleship program being implemented. According to Arnold and Black; if a healthy, thoroughly planned small group ministry is implemented, the church can begin to enjoy some of the many benefits. Among these are the discovery of spiritual gifts, the maturity of lay leadership, effective congregational care, worship, evangelism, and spiritual and numerical growth.<sup>11</sup>

The writer concurs with the previous statement and attest to the validity of Arnold and Blacks statements concerning the benefits of implementing a healthy, and thoroughly

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Arnold and Stephanie Black, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

planned small group ministry. The writer has witnessed firsthand the evidence of spiritual growth in some of its participants within some of the ministries as it relates to the area of congregational care.

For example, the writer recalls a young lady who attended another church located near Marvin, which did not have an active women's bible study group. This young lady had suffered a tragic loss that of her son. She began to search for a ministry that could meet her needs. She was advised of the women's bible study at Marvin and began to attend. The objective of the women's ministry is not to lure members away from other churches to become members of Marvin but to make women whole again spiritually, emotionally and mentally. As a result of attending this small group, this young lady began to slowly heal from the loss, move past her pain and begin to rely on her faith to strengthen her day by day. Within a year's time the ministry has seen her go through a transition from a state of grief to a state of acceptance and peace. She has testified to others about the impact that this group has made on her life. She stated that her therapist said that within the last few months she had seen a significant change in her. She said "I joined a group that literally transformed me and saved my life."

Another benefit of implementing a healthy, and thoroughly planned small group ministry, identified by Arnold and Black was the area of discovering spiritual gifts<sup>12</sup>. Helping members to understand where and how they might be able to use their gifts and serve the church in a relevant way, is to encourage members to discover their spiritual gifts. At Marvin in an effort to respond to the needs of its members a spiritual gifts inventory class was created and has been successful in helping members to identify their

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

spiritual gifts. The writer in his role as Pastor, after speaking with his new members' class coordinator, made the spiritual gifts inventory class as a part of the new members' curriculum. At the time of this project every new member that joined Marvin was enrolled in the spiritual gifts class. This class was made available to all current members as well. So now the opportunity exists for all of Marvin members to take part in the spiritual gifts inventory class, discover their potential and decide where they can best serve in the church.

During the process of researching the small group discipleship model, various discipleship models emerged such as friendship networking as a form of discipleship. This concept was practiced early in the formation of the church, during the times of Jesus. This form of discipleship revolves around disciples being dependent upon the hospitality of others and friends of others in order to carry on the work of spreading the gospel. Malina and Joubert's book, *A Time Travel to the World of Jesus*, speaks to this concept. The writer understands the notion of friendship networking as a form of discipleship. However this method of evangelism and discipleship relies quite heavily on the willingness of others to respond with generosity to meet the needs of disciples and would be challenging to implement today due to the growing concept of separatism within the modern community.

## **Spiritual Maturity**

The writer's contends that through the small group discipleship model; one can use any ministry group and fuse discipleship principles in with the subject matter of the

group and create members with a favorable attitude towards discipleship. By using this method, members within these groups will experience some form of spiritual growth. However, in order to evaluate if your congregation is experiencing spiritual growth, it is imperative that a Pastor/leader understands what spiritual maturity and growth looks like within his/her congregation, and have it clearly defined and understood from their perspective.

Sally Gallagher and Chelsea Newton in their article entitled, *Defining Spiritual Growth: Congregations, Community and Connectedness*, “explore the concepts, means, and objectives of spiritual growth across four strands of Christianity<sup>13</sup>. The research is based on focus group interviews and congregational observations within four congregations (conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and emerging church). The authors’ gathered information from regular attendees in regards to their concepts of spiritual growth, the practices that contributed to their sense of growth, and the church’s belief as it pertains to spiritual growth and lastly, how spiritual growth takes place and if it contributes to a sense of congregational community.”<sup>14</sup> The authors; “find expected variations across strands of tradition, as well as similarities (particularly within Protestant groups) in framing spiritual growth as an open ended and somewhat ambiguous process in which the personal and emotional resources of the community support a sense of personal growth and well-being.”<sup>15</sup> Their findings indicate support

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<sup>13</sup>Chelsea Newton, Sally K. Gallagher , *Defining Spiritual Growth: Congregations, Community, and Connectedness* (Sociology of Religion 2009), 70:3 232-261 doi:10.1093/socrel/srp039

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

towards the idea that churches with strong and defined core messages of spiritual growth develop stronger congregational commitments.

Spiritual growth is described by Gallagher and Newton as “a process involving expansion of knowledge and experience related to spiritual or religious identity.” This definition was used as a starting point to assess how congregational members understood and defined spiritual growth from a personal context and based on their own faiths. The authors also discovered that most research associated with spiritual growth addressed five key issues “(1) the types of spiritual capital available within religious settings; (2) the cognitive processes involved in the development of religious identity; (3) the types of religious messages that are associated with congregational vitality and growth; (4) the goals and outcomes of spiritual growth (e.g., how emphasis on personal journeys of spiritual growth can lead to continued attendance and group cohesion); and (5) appropriate research methodologies for studying spiritual growth and commitment.”<sup>16</sup>

The writer believes that the small group discipleship model supports key issue 4 regarding spiritual growth as outlined in the previous paragraph. The small group discipleship model creates a safe and secure environment that encourages an individual to grow and develop their walk with Christ among their fellow members. Small group settings foster an atmosphere of trust, camaraderie, and confidentiality which creates group cohesion and continued attendance, but more importantly it encourages individuals to express their personal or spiritual journey; and as a result, this serves as a foundation to support individual spiritual growth.

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<sup>16</sup>(Newton, Gallagher, Defining Spiritual Growth, 2009)

The authors feel along with documented research that a “strong, core message that is consistently preached, taught and emphasized within the local church will also create an environment that nurtures spiritual formation and growth and fosters a sense of community and religious identity.”<sup>17</sup> Gallagher and Newton makes the case that each of the groups identified earlier (*conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and emerging church*) that “expressed ideas around spiritual growth are generally consistent with their local church culture, message and broader theological tradition.”

The writer would suggest that before a leader or a Pastor can implement his/her vision for growth within their church, he/she must understand the characteristics of its church culture, the membership as a whole, church traditions, religious beliefs, and doctrinal beliefs. Gallagher and Newton identified these characteristics within four main congregations that were mentioned previously. The writer believes the authors’ descriptions of these congregations serves as valuable information and the descriptions of each will be included in this literary review.

The writer believes that the information provided can assist a Pastor or leader in identifying characteristics that may be common to his/her church and can serve as guide to understanding what members define as spiritual growth based upon the individual church settings. The writer believes that this information not only supports his small group disciple model but also serves as a guide for other Pastors looking to grow their church spiritually.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid

The research states; "within the *mainline Presbyterian Church*, understanding spiritual growth as a personal journey and open-ended process echoed themes within the congregation around tolerance and respect for diversity of beliefs. Members were reluctant to specify either the means or ends of spiritual growth, but rather emphasized how it is a personal matter that involves an increasing ability to recognize transcendence in ordinary things and grow in personal integrity—where action corresponds to beliefs about the value of persons. Within the *conservative Protestant* congregation, concepts of spiritual growth reflected *core teachings* around the need for new birth and baptism, as well as the importance of integration into small fellowship groups. Immersion in the church's teachings, bible reading, small group ministries, and conservative Protestant media each contributed to a sense of identity as being different from "the world"; while a sense of mission and evangelism energized efforts to reach out to those outside the church. At *St. Andrew's*, clear and frequent presentation of practices intended to foster spiritual growth reflected ancient traditions and beliefs articulated in sermons, bulletins, and catechumen new member classes. Both the means and ends of spiritual growth were clear—to become like God through gradually being weaned of self- indulgence and expanding one's ability to love and care for others. At the *Urban Village* emerging church, a consensus around spiritual growth centered on relationships with God, family, and friends within the church and the broader community. Authenticity in each of these areas was both a means of spiritual growth and its end. To be mature in this congregation was to cultivate deep and

meaningful relationships with trusted others in much the same way as in a personal and authentic relationship with God.”<sup>18</sup>

The writer found that Marvin A.M.E Zion church had characteristics indicative of three of the four congregations observed; *mainline Presbyterian, conservative Protestant and emerging church*, however the strongest similarity being of conservative Protestant and emerging church. Some of the methods used within these congregations to encourage spiritual growth are and have begun to be implemented within Marvin if it does not already exist. Understanding the characteristics of these four congregations can be used as a tool to determine how and what model for growth a Pastor/or leader would like to use or implement in order to grow its church spiritually.

There are a few areas worth highlighting with regard to the general definition of spiritual growth. The process or methods (methods could include but not limited to fasting, prayer, or small group participation) in achieving spiritual growth or defining spiritual growth within the context of the four congregations (was a part of each groups discussion, yet the responses regarding the methodology) were quite varied.

According to Gallagher and Newton, the research showed that “participants whose congregational culture included strong and clear messages of spiritual growth (in this case the *Conservative Protestant, Orthodox, and emerging church groups*) were themselves better able to articulate their ideas around the meaning, means, and ends of spiritual growth drawing on language made available to them in services, membership classes, bulletins, religious literature, and other media. Members of these groups described a process in which greater participation in prayer, bible reading,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

service, and worship are expected to produce personal change—changes in which individual believers become more like God.”<sup>19</sup>

The descriptions of congregational culture as outlined by the authors indicate that there is some support in the theory that a clearly articulated message around spiritual growth would be associated with a greater sense of congregational unity community.”<sup>20</sup> The core message can be emphasized throughout the church through various ministries or small groups. Also research indicates that congregations that experienced greater small group participation and broader personal networks within the church appeared to have a greater sense of family amongst the membership.

The research on theories of spiritual growth has given some support to the idea that spiritual growth is associated with specific sets of teachings or core messages within a congregational setting. But it also lends support to both formal and informal religious mentoring (such as small groups), as well as the specificity of doctrines as it relates to that institution be presented in membership classes. This may also contribute to greater commitment to the congregation as well as personal spiritual growth.<sup>21</sup>

The writer contends that the research discussed gives Pastors and leaders a more in depth understanding of how congregational culture can foster spiritual growth within the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

congregation and provides a better understanding of what discipleship models would be best within the confines of his/her congregations.

Most assessments of spiritual growth focus on the individual experience and cognitive processes involved, however Gallagher and Newton focused on the social “context in which concepts are formed, assessed, appropriated, and applied. Congregational culture provides a context for these processes—processes through which religious traditions offer a diversity of models and means for greater religious experience, understanding and practice.”<sup>22</sup>

Frank A Thomas is the Senior Pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Church of Christ, located in Memphis TN. He is the author of *Spiritual Maturity: Preserving Congregational Health and Balance*.<sup>23</sup> This work is an examination of methods that Thomas, uses in helping today’s church redefine health and disease in the congregational body and empowering individuals with responsibilities, more control and more freedom in their lives. The book is divided into four modules.<sup>24</sup> Module 1 is entitled the call to the Victorious Christian life. This module gives the reader three distinct lessons complete with case studies that serve as living examples of challenges that can be overcome as members pursue victorious Christian living.<sup>25</sup> Module 2 deals with the mature self. In this module Thomas leads the reader in examining four different case studies that address

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<sup>22</sup> Chelsea Newton, Sally K. Gallagher , Defining Spiritual Growth: Congregations, Community, and Connectedness (*Sociology of Religion* 2009), 70:3 232-261 doi: 10.1093/socrel/srp039

<sup>23</sup> Frank A. Thomas, *Spiritual Maturity: Preserving Congregational Health and Balance*.(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002.)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

individual lifestyles that fall short of mature Christian living<sup>26</sup>. Module 3 is entitled the, Mature Church Member, in this module Thomas has provided the reader seven different case studies that take the reader through various church experiences as they have been lived out by actual members of live congregations. These case studies deal with a myriad of different issues; privilege of membership, abuse, anxiety, and self initiating into active service.<sup>27</sup> Module 4 deals with the mature church leader. In this module there are three case studies and they composite a description of the ideal mature leader, describing attributes and qualities a person like this would posses. The case studies deal with prayer, as a vehicle to clarity, decisiveness, evidence of faith at work and the courage involved in leading congregations.<sup>28</sup>

The writer has used this resource in a study for his leadership team and found that leaders that participated in the study were very receptive to the material, there were even some members after reading the modules and case studies recognized themselves in some of the characters described in the book. One particular evening the writer remembers one of his officers approaching him after one of studies with the book and confessed his relief that he was accepted as he was. The writer believes that this book was instrumental in expounding on the importance of members understanding the value in growing spiritually.

Newton's book, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*, states the following; "Throughout church history, particularly in the midst of persecution, Christians have looked forward to the living hope of one day seeing Christ in glory. That hope carries

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

with it the sure expectation of an inheritance that far surpasses the value of the greatest earthly treasure. The joy of eventually being like Christ and reflecting His radiant glory gives Christians a clear vision even in the midst of suffering, failure, and difficulty.”<sup>29</sup>

Newton’s thought on the redemptive power of unearned suffering is encouragement for believers who find themselves suffering in this present age. He correctly states that there is a glory experienced by those who seek Christ as their reward for righteous living.

In his summary he further states; “When Christ called men and women to follow Him, He never hid the cost. In fact, Jesus went out of His way to explain the radical nature of His standards for discipleship. But the cost was negligible compared to the glory to be revealed when His followers would actually become like their master. To become His disciple, Jesus taught that one’s whole self must commit to loving and obeying Him.”<sup>30</sup>

Newton echoes the sentiment of past theologians such as Bonhoeffer who has suggested that there is a cost involved in true discipleship. Only the spiritually mature are prepared to contend with the challenges that a Christ-like lifestyle will produce. Newton’s words accurately depict; the challenges that believers face as a part of the maturing process.

Transitioning from the first stage of spiritual development prenatal care, to new birth, into becoming more like Christ, and finally becoming a more perfect reflection of Christ is not an easy process. However, these changes have been apparent within some members of the Marvin congregation, in particular, those who have become involved with a small

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<sup>29</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*, Biblical essentials series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

group within the church. “Nurturing the soul through the four stages of spiritual development ultimately achieves a prize for the faithful follower of Jesus Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, our search for a place to belong will only be satisfied when we find our eternal family. And for many of us our best experience of belonging is being part of the Christian community in small groups—an idea that began at creation.<sup>32</sup> Spiritual development ultimately achieves a prize for the faithful follower of Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup>

After reviewing literature for this chapter, the writer finds that there is conclusive evidence that Discipleship training conducted in a small group setting, can lead to spiritual maturity and development.

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<sup>31</sup> Gary C. Newton, *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*, Biblical essentials series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 30.

<sup>32</sup>(Long, *Small Group*, 1995).

<sup>33</sup>(Newton, *Spiritual Maturity*, 2004)

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### The Historical Perspective

The term *disciple* is derived from the Greek word *maqhthv*, which refers to any student, pupil, or apprentice. It referred to imitating the teacher's life, inculcating his values, and reproducing his teachings. In the ancient world it is most often associated, with people who were devoted followers of a great religious leader or teacher of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The Greeks used the term *maqhthv* to refer to a "learner," or on a more committed level, an "adherent." We can find the concept of *disciple* among the great masters of Greece. Plato, Socrates, and Herodotus all used the term *disciple* to mean "learner" or "one who is a diligent student." These and other Greek philosophers generally understood that the *disciple*'s life involved apprenticeship, a relationship of submission, and a life of demanding training.<sup>2</sup> The Sophists also used the term to refer to an "institutional pupil." The passing on of wisdom to the young for the purpose of character formation has always been around. It has also been very crucial to helping the young in accomplishing tasks and achieving long-term goals. Throughout history, mentors or spiritual guides have helped temper people's tendency to be lazy, lose focus, or give into temptation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Herrick, Greg. "Go and Make Disciples of All Nations," [www.Bible.org](http://www.Bible.org). <http://bible.org/series/go-and-make-disciples-all-nations> (accessed March 30, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Hull, Robert, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, New York, New York: Navpress, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid

Just as there were disciples in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, there were also people called disciples in Judaism as well. Those people were committed to a recognized leader or movement. This involved Jews committed to Philosophical schools or to religious and political sects. The Pharisees had their own disciples and they claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28-29). John the Baptist also had disciples who lived with him and followed him, practiced his ascetic lifestyle, and promulgated to some extent his teachings (Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1; John 3:25; Acts 19:1-7).<sup>4</sup>

In general, the education of boys in first century Judaism centered in the home around Torah learning. The Torah was taught primarily by the Father. After a boy turned thirteen years old there was no more formal education. If he wanted further training in preparation for being a judge, teacher, scribe, or head of a synagogue, he would continue his study of the Torah in a small group or seek to study as a disciple under a certain scholar. The apostle Paul was an example of a Jewish boy who had left home to study the Law under Gamaliel, a noted Rabbi in Jerusalem (Acts 5:34; 22:3).<sup>5</sup>

The premier discipleship relationship in the history of Israel was that of Moses and Joshua. Their relationship lasted the longest, and its context is rich with applications. According to Author and Theologian Robert Hull, their relationship manifests itself in the five characteristics of what humans need to grow and develop.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> (Herrick, Go and Make Disciples, 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> (Hull, Discipleship, 2006)

### Relationships to Nurture

Moses needed a lot of encouragement because he faced great and demanding tasks. With help from his brother Aaron, and his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses obeyed God and rescued God's people from Egyptian tyranny. Then when Moses went up the mountain to meet with God, he took Joshua as his aide (see Exodus 24:13). From that time forward, Joshua served by Moses's side.<sup>7</sup>

### Apprenticeship for Competence

From the time of the visit with God and through many personal and organizational crises, Joshua observed and learned how to lead difficult people in challenging circumstances even when the leader is filled with self-doubt. He saw Moses slam the tablets to the ground. He saw Moses make mistakes, such as striking the rock for water rather than speaking to it in a trusting way. At the same time, he listened outside Moses' tent and heard the cries of his mentor pleading with God to show mercy on the people.<sup>8</sup>

### Accountability for Tasks

Moses' task seemed so simple: Take the people into the land. Yet it was a daunting one. By administrating much of the work, Joshua learned the daily challenges of managing two million people.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> (Hull, Discipleship 2006)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

### Submission for Shaping

Joshua remained faithful to God and to Moses, even when he faced pressure from others close to him to go along with various disagreements: when Moses' sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, rebelled; when the people demanded meat rather than manna; when conflict arose over Moses' new wife; and when all but one of the spies reported that entering the land of promise would be too dangerous. Joshua's submission to the Father and to his servant Moses shaped him into a man of strong faith and character.<sup>10</sup>

### Wisdom for Decision Making

God selected Joshua to replace Moses because Joshua was ready. God chose him, Moses trained him, and then God anointed him (see Deuteronomy 1:38; 31:1-30). Moses told Joshua to "be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you" (Deuteronomy 31:23). Joshua then crossed the Jordan River, took the city of Ai, conquered the five kings of the region, went on to capture the entire land of Canaan, renewed the covenant, divided the land among the twelve tribes, and faithfully served until the Lord gave Israel rest from her enemies. Still faithfully serving at the end of his life, Joshua charged Israel's leaders with the wisdom he'd learned from Moses and from God: "You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you" (Joshua 23:3). We can see the influence Moses had of on Joshua and the influence Joshua had on others in the epilogue to the book of Joshua.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

The Middle Eastern world that Jesus was born into was steeped in the tradition of apprenticeship. Various schools of religious thought all claimed their ground with great passion, and each required a great deal of their disciples. Let's look briefly at four groups. The way they made disciples is helpful to us today, when we understand the requirements of the first century, we get a clearer picture as to how we should be and should make disciples now.

The Pharisees saw it as their calling to protect the law by retaining written and oral traditions. They believed in the importance of daily rules. They were highly committed, but their zeal often caused them to go too far. They were tragically misguided and missed the entire point of Jesus (John 5:39-40). However, these well-intentioned men were very curious, and they took Jesus seriously. When Jesus spoke they scrutinized every word, remembered it, discussed it, and then became enraged because they understood Jesus' words. They knew he was taking them apart point by point when he declared, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). On a number of occasions they tore their robes, threw dust in the air, and attempted to kill Jesus (John 8:59).

The Pharisees also sponsored a formal rabbinical school, and a number of their rabbis became very popular. The Jewish historian Josephus noted that so many young men gathered around rabbis in Herod's day that they were like an army.<sup>12</sup> Gamaliel II reportedly had a thousand disciples who worked on mastering the complex and extensive

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

Torah. The Pharisees' demanding discipleship system rewarded only the best and brightest and was the doorway to a wonderful religious career.<sup>13</sup> Disciples of John the Baptist John the Baptist proclaimed a purist form of Judaism focused on repentance, seeking God, and serving God a manifestation very close to the kind of discipleship Jesus espoused.<sup>14</sup> John had many disciples, and only two left him to follow Jesus in the early stages. Many of John's disciples, twelve in one recorded case believed on Jesus at a later date.

The concept of making disciples in first century thought was brought to life by Peter, James and John's interpretation of the words of Jesus. The first thought Peter, James, John, and likely had when they heard Jesus say, "Make disciples," was that they would find and develop other people like themselves. Clearly the apostle Paul believed this years later. All of these men knew that making disciples involved making a serious commitment to follow a leader. Robert Hull speaks of five distinct characteristics of first-century discipleship based on their actions.

#### Deciding to follow a teacher

Young men could join a variety of schools, each led by a rabbi or a teacher. In some cases, students chose their teacher and, of course, teachers could accept or reject a student's application. If a young man hadn't achieved a certain academic and social status by the time of his bar mitzvah at age thirteen, he would instead choose a life of farming, fishing, carpentry, or the like. The fact that Jesus and his followers were laborers explains why the religious establishment didn't accept them. The disciple of first-century Judaism

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

learned everything from his teachers. He learned his teacher's stories, his life habits, how to keep the Sabbath his way, and his interpretations of the Torah. And when a disciple learned everything his teacher knew, he then taught his own disciples. A disciple's commitment to follow his teacher lies at the heart of the transformational process. Every disciple must make a commitment of submission to at least one other person. Without this relational dimension, everything that follows is weakened. The teacher-disciple relationship creates a powerful bond that's at least as important and often more crucial than a father-son relationship.

First-century discipleship was expressed as a servant-master relationship. Once accepted as a disciple, a young man started as a talmidh, or beginner, who sat in the back of the room and could not speak. Ten he became a distinguished student, who took an independent line in his approach or questioning. At the next level, he became a disciple-associate, who sat immediately behind the rabbi during prayer time. Finally he achieved the highest level, a disciple of the wise, and was recognized as the intellectual equal of his rabbi.<sup>15</sup>

### Memorizing the Teacher's Words

Oral tradition provided the basic way of studying. Disciples learned the teacher's words verbatim to pass along to the next person. Often disciples learned as many as four interpretations of each major passage in the Torah.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

## Learning the Teacher's Way of Ministry

A disciple learned how his teacher kept God's commands, including how he practiced the Sabbath, fasted, prayed, and said blessings in ceremonial situations. He would also learn his rabbi's teaching methods and the many traditions his master followed.<sup>17</sup>

## Imitating the Teacher's Life and Character

Jesus said that when a disciple is fully taught, he "will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). The highest calling of a disciple was to imitate his teacher. Paul called on Timothy to follow his example (2 Timothy 3:10-14), and he didn't hesitate to call on all believers to do the same (1 Corinthians 4:14-16; 11:1; Philippians 4:9). One story in ancient tradition tells of a rabbinical student so devoted to his teacher that he hid in the teacher's bedchamber to discover the mentor's sexual technique. To be sure, this is a bit extreme, yet it demonstrates the level of commitment required to be a disciple.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

## Raising Up Their Own Disciples

When a disciple finished his training, he was expected to reproduce what he'd learned by finding and training his own apprentices. He would start his own school and call it after his name, such as the House of Hillel.<sup>19</sup>

These five characteristics describe the institution of discipleship as practiced in the first century. Jesus used these practices with his closest followers. When he called on them to make disciples, he expected them to find others who would make the five commitments. When he said, "[Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20), they knew the task would require the kind of dedication found in these five commitments.

Discipleship is a call to be with, know and enjoy the Master. To follow Jesus and this is, at times, no easy matter. He demands exclusive, complete, and unflinching obedience to Himself. This is where his summons to discipleship is so radically different from Plato who stressed the freedom of the student from the teacher or even the Jewish religious leaders who focused more on the Torah and steered their disciples away from themselves. Jesus, on the other hand, pointed people to himself and calls them to radical commitment to him. Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to Christ-likeness. Jesus' call to discipleship is an all-or-nothing summons, reaching into every area of our lives. It involves giving him preeminence over the closest of our human relationships and over the desires we have for our lives. In short, it involves becoming his servant in the world and giving your life to that end. Paradoxically we give up that which we cannot keep to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

gain that which we cannot lose. If we don't, we lose all in the end. The cross was an instrument of death and well known to the Jews. The suffering was intolerable. But Jesus says we are to take it up and follow him. This will, in the nature of the case, involve self-denial. The one who picked up the cross-beam of his cross was headed down a one-way street, never to return.<sup>20</sup>

### Theological Foundation

As the writer thought through the development of a Discipleship focused Theology, words such as committed, student, disciplined. As these words are contemplated, questions began to form: exactly, what are the duties of the disciple? How does a member of a current local church determine what is applicable to their life now as compared to the life of disciples in the first century church. In order to shed light on these questions and others, we must spend time engaging the Scriptures, and respond to what they reveal about discipleship, and its meaning.

With these thoughts in mind, developing a theology of discipleship must include instruction, revealing God's intended path for believers to become spiritually mature, responsible and committed followers of Christ.

In his book, growing toward spiritual maturity, Gary Newton states in Chapter Two "Before we begin to understand *how* to become something, we must have a clear picture of *what* it is that we want to become".<sup>21</sup> Newton continues his thoughts by sharing with

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<sup>20</sup> (Herrick, Go and Make Disciples, 2012)

<sup>21</sup>Newton, Gary C. *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

the reader how Scripture uses the term *Disciple* in different ways, depending on the context. At least seven different uses of the term are found throughout the Old and New Testaments: Listed below are some of his examples.

1. *Followers of a leader*—those who followed various leaders like Moses, John the Baptist, rabbis, Pharisees, and Jesus (John 1:35, 37).
2. *Various types of followers of Jesus*—the gospel writers describe general followers (Luke 6:13), serious believers (John 9:27), Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57), Ananias (Acts 9:10), Dorcas (Acts 9:36), and large groups of interested seekers (Luke 6:17).
3. *The apostles*—Often used in a formal sense to mean “the twelve,” the specially chosen leaders that Jesus appointed to be closest to Him and to lead the Great Commission after His death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 6:13).
4. *Superficial, shallow, or simply curious followers*—People with a casual level of commitment to Jesus. When He says something they do not like, they leave Him. In this case, the usage may be similar to students in a modern classroom who are physically present in class but not serious about learning (John 6:60, 64, 66, 71).
5. *Known traitors with false motives*—Probably one of the most controversial personalities is Judas Iscariot. Interestingly, he is named as both a disciple and a member of “the twelve” (John 12:4).
6. *Sincere followers who made serious mistakes and failed often*—This is where we find Peter. Although he was committed from the heart to follow Jesus, he made many serious mistakes (Luke 22:31, 32, 57, 60–62).<sup>22</sup>
7. *Jesus' exclusive use of the term “my disciple”*—From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus began to create, through modeling and teaching, a unique picture of what His disciples should be like. That distinctive picture is developed through stories, parables, illustrations, sermons, and question-and-answer sessions.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Jesus commanded the disciples: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mat. 28:19-20. NIV)

Discipleship is vital for every man and woman. It was modeled by Jesus through scripture. He said: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV) In this passage, Jesus now sends those who have been discipled by him to now go into the world and to reproduce more disciples, with the same teachings that they received, they are now equipped to provide to others.

A simple definition for “practical theology” is “a place in theology where the practical meets the theoretical and forms a union.” It has also been defined as, “a bridge between academic theory and life practice.” It is the place where academic theory is applied to life situations. In the church it can be called ministry.<sup>24</sup> There are numerous ministries that would be placed under the guise of practical theology; Preaching, worship, administration, education, pastoral care, spirituality, social action, evangelism, world mission, and stewardship.<sup>25</sup> According to Schleiermacher, “each listed area addresses some particular aspect of Christian practice, a ministerial task, a church program, or a plan for personal development.”<sup>26</sup> The Pre-Practical Theology era found a divide

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<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christain Caring: Selections from Practical Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

between the discipline of theology and people's daily lives and experiences. These experiences represented everyday practical needs. These needs were both physical and spiritual in nature. Practical Theology is charged with bridging the gap by bringing life to theology through practice. When studying theology it is easy to get lost in a group of theories with no practice attached to them. Dale P. Andrews comments that, "Practical theology is often understood through what it does." It brings practice to theory that result in an action that will be edifying to someone in need or that addresses a certain situation.<sup>27</sup>

Friedrich Schleiermacher is the original proponent of Practical Theology. He was considered by many to be not only a premier figure in western theology, but he was equally known for his contributions to the field of Philosophy. His research and contributions to the discourse between practical and scholarly divisions of Christian and religious thought continue to cause his voice to remain relevant even now in discussions concerning discipleship.

Schleiermacher was a pastor and teacher by vocation. He described religion as a union between the theoretical and the practical. He stated that: "Religion is for you at one time a way of thinking, a faith, a particular way of contemplating the world, and of combining what meets us in the world: at another, it is a way of acting, a peculiar desire and love, a special kind of conduct and character. Without this distinction of a theoretical

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<sup>27</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African-America Folk Religion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

and practical you could hardly think at all, and though both sides belong to religion, you are usually accustomed to give heed chiefly to only one at a time.”<sup>28</sup>

It was this primary thought that became the initial development of Practical Theology. A place where the contemplative thought concerning the word and what it brings to mankind daily can be interfaced with the actions and responses of the people of God. He is saying that people do not need to choose one or the other. Both are important and can be done at the same time. As the field of Christian Ethics developed, practical theology moved toward the area of Pastoral Theology. Schleiermacher contended that “Because practical theology focuses on church leadership as a whole, it cannot be merely a “pastoral theology” dealing with the work of ordained ministers alone.” In the church, clergy are expected to provide leadership because of this; pastoral theology has a prominent place in practical theology. In the field of practical theology there is no distinction between clergy and laity.

In further defining practical theology, Schleiermacher divided his new concept into two separate areas, church service, and church government. Church service, which is what he concentrated heavily on, encompassed what he called leadership activities in the local church such as worship, homiletics, pastoral care and counseling, catechetic, and missions. Church government dealt more with what he called the denominational work. He felt that leadership of the church is about up building the community and equipping the saints.

Ecclesiastes 4 presents the concept that two people are better than one and that a cord of three strands is not easily broken. This ideal and his concept speak to the fact

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

that as people of God we are better together than own our own.<sup>29</sup> The Bible has a wealth of examples of how many men and women of God understood this ideal and allowed themselves to be attached to others that could serve as mentors to them as they navigated through their lives of faith. They were not only discipled from a spiritual perspective;<sup>30</sup> they were discipled on everyday life issues. In Matthew 25, Jesus, who is a mentor to all Christians, taught about finance. In Matthew 5, He taught about marriage. Also in Matthew 5, He taught about relationships. He did so because in the Jewish tradition life issues were not separated from the spiritual aspects of life. The Enlightenment period brought a theology into play that separated spiritual and practical matters concentrating only on the spiritual. As a result, there was a great deal of spiritual Christians that were ill-equipped to deal with everyday life issues.

Beyond parents, the Bible makes it clear that there are people who know the way of wisdom. These are people who have experienced life and responded in God's grace, thereby pleasing God with spiritual growth. These are people who have been discipled themselves by allowing others the right to speak into their lives along with the Holy Spirit. Paul was a man of this stature. Before his conversion, Paul (Saul) was taught by Gamaliel, one of the great teachers of the law at that time. Subsequent to his conversion, Paul came into fellowship with Barnabus and the apostles. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise will grow wise but a companion of fools suffers harm." Paul not only

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<sup>29</sup> Ernest Jeffries, "College Knowledge: Transforming Aspirations Into Attainment" DMin., diss., United Theological Seminary, 2011

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

walked with the wise, those who had been changed by Jesus, but he also began to bring up others in the wisdom that he himself had been given.<sup>31</sup>

Just as a master tradesman employs an apprentice, so Paul found Timothy to build into, by teaching and encouraging him in the things of God. Timothy, a young believer, is encouraged directly in two letters in the Bible. Given that much attention, it seems to uniquely display the value of Biblical discipleship and mentorship to God.<sup>32</sup>

Discipleship through small groups can be interpreted as an example of practical theology. When carried out through the use of small groups, discipleship becomes a ministry that is provided by the church and engaged in by small groups, and eventually the entire congregation. In an average size church, it is not possible for the pastor to minister effectively to the needs of an entire congregation as an individual; discipleship can be one of the methods used to address this challenge. In order to verify that discipleship can successfully occur within a small group setting at Marvin AME Zion Church, the following questions must be asked and answered. Is it possible that under the umbrella of Marvin, that new Disciples can be produced? If so, then the question becomes can Marvin provide an atmosphere where newly discipled members can be successful in becoming spiritually mature and eventually go on to make disciples of others? In his book, *The Local Church and Mission*, Theodore Williams shares eight descriptions of the ideal local church based on biblical observations:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Theodore Williams, *The Local Church and Mission*. Singapore: Oversees Mission Fellowship, 1998.

## The nature of the local church

- The local church is a commonwealth.

Paul writes, “You are fellow citizens with the saints.” (Ephesians 2:19) The church is compared to a commonwealth whose citizens share in common privileges. All the members of God’s body will experience the promised blessings no matter what your age, race, socioeconomic status, class or other descriptor might be.

- The local church is a household.

“You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19) The same love and concern shown in a family’s household should be demonstrated in the household of God. As home is, it should be a place of comfort and safety for those who dwell there in.

- The local church is a building.

“Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:20) It is pretty clear that the scriptures are speaking of a spiritual building with the emphasis being on teachings of the apostles and prophets who present the word of God. The local church is the place where the word of God is preached and taught. The members are held together by their common faith.<sup>34</sup>

- The local church is a temple.

“The whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:21-22)

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

The focus of this verse is God's presence in the local congregation and the worship that is offered to Him.<sup>35</sup>

- The local church is a Body.

"You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) The idea that the congregation is a "body" is significant when discussing mentorship.

The Apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12 that everyone in the congregation has a purpose and that the congregation cannot function properly without all its members.

- The local church is a flock.

"Tend the flock of God that is in your charge." (1 Peter 5:4) Peter addresses Christian living in this verse. He speaks of those who are appointed to care for the believers who are the congregation.<sup>36</sup>

Williams, states that all of the biblical descriptions of the church are visible in the story of the New Testament church in Acts:<sup>37</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.<sup>38</sup> (Acts 2:43-3:1)

The purpose of the local church.

- Ministry to God: Worship

In relation to God, the congregation's purpose is to worship God. Paul exhorts the congregation at Colossae, "Sing songs and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16) The corporate ministry to God is the main function of the local congregation.

- Ministry to believers: Nurture

The Apostle Paul often encourages Christian congregations to care for and nurture fellow believers. In Colossians 3:16, he talks about presenting every man mature in Christ. And to the congregation in Ephesus he admonishes leadership to equip saints for the work of the ministry.

- Ministry to the world: Evangelism and Mercy

Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19) This instruction is evangelistic in nature. We are also called to be merciful because God our father is merciful.

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<sup>38</sup> The New King James Version of the Bible, 1982.

## Biblical Foundation

According to Herrick, Discipleship can be seen throughout the Covenantal relationships portrayed in scripture. In his research on discipleship, he suggest because of God's relational ties to mankind during differing generations, that God seeks out individuals to interact with, teach, and even work through to respond to his people and their need.<sup>39</sup>

Listed below are excerpts from Herrick's observations of the four major covenants: Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and The New Covenant. All scriptural references are from the New International Version Bible (NIV).

### Abrahamic Covenant

The point of mentioning the Abrahamic covenant here is that it demonstrates that God's plan centers on *blessing people*; that's what He's about. That's what discipleship is all about. It involves blessing people with *intentionality*.<sup>40</sup>

God promised Abraham many wonderful things, including (1) *seed* (a nation to come from his loins); (2) a *land* to live in; (3) the *personal blessing* of an esteemed name and reputation, and (4) *universal blessing* (i.e., blessing to the entire world through Abraham). Thus, from the very beginning of creation God's plan has been to bless people. His choice of Abraham reveals the personal and universal nature of that plan.<sup>41</sup>

**Genesis 12:1** Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land that I will show you. **12:2** Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, in order that you might be a prime example of divine blessing. **12:3** I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and *all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.*”<sup>42</sup>

### The Mosaic Covenant

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<sup>39</sup> (Herrick, Go and Make Disciples, 2012)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

Sometime after God had given Abraham and his posterity the Abrahamic covenant, he established the Law in Israel through Moses. It is important to note that to be in relationship with God, through his grace, implies that we live a certain way (e.g., Titus 2:1-15, esp. vv. 11-12). We cannot live any way we please and at the same time claim to know God (Titus 1:16). Our lives betray the lie. So, in keeping with his eternal holiness, God in his grace revealed the Law to Moses so that the children of Israel might understand what it means to walk with and live for God. The Law did not give them a relationship with God, but was rather given to them *because they were in relationship with God—the God who had redeemed them from Egypt*. All its ceremonial and social orientations were temporary until the sacrifice of Christ and it itself—as a whole—*points* to Christ (Rom 3:21; Gal 3:23-25). The holy standards of the law are still in effect though interpreted and applied by our Lord and his apostles in light of the new covenant (Matt 5:18-20; Rom 8:3-4; 13:8-10). For example, the demand to “have no other Gods before me,” as spoken in Exodus 20:3, and the prohibition against idolatry (Exodus 20:4) are applied in discipleship in terms of the Lordship of Christ and the exclusive worship due to Him alone. We saw in lecture one that we, as adherents of our Lord, are to cling to Him and follow him only. We are not to chase after other gods. We do not have to sacrifice goats, lambs, etc. nor are we to separate from people on an ethnic basis, but we are to live holy lives to the Lord. We are not to steal, lie, covet, murder, commit adultery, or misuse the name of the Lord.<sup>43</sup>

#### **1D. Deuteronomy 4:12-13**

**4:13** And he revealed to you *the covenant* he has commanded you to keep, the ten commandments, writing them on two stone tablets. **4:14** Moreover, at that same time the LORD commanded me to teach you statutes and ordinances for you to keep in the land to which you are going as your inheritance.<sup>44</sup>

#### **2D. Galatians 3:21-25**

**3:21** Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. **3:22** But the scripture imprisoned everything and everyone under sin so that the promise could be given—because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ—to those who believe. **3:23** Now before faith came we were held in custody under the law, being kept as prisoners until the coming faith would be revealed. **3:24** *Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith.* **3:25** But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

### 3D. Hebrews 8:13

When he speaks of *a new covenant*, he makes the first obsolete. Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear.<sup>46</sup>

### 4D. Romans 8:3-4

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened , God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be s sinful offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according tot he sinful nature but according to the Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

### 5D. Romans 13:8-10

**13:8** Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. **13:9** For the commandments, “*do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet*,” (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” **13:10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor. *Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*<sup>48</sup>

## The Davidic Covenant

The promise given to David concerns *seed*, the guarantee of a throne, and the promise that a house/temple would be built for Yahweh. Thus the Davidic covenant is really an expansion and development of the Abrahamic covenant, in particular, the seed aspect. It guarantees that the blessing God promised to the world will always be available through His chosen or anointed king. The question is, will the people be able to receive it? The Jeremiah or New covenant answers that question.<sup>49</sup>

### 1D. 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16

**7:12** When the time comes for you to die, I will raise up your descendant, one of your own *sons*, to succeed you, and I will establish his *kingdom*. **7:13** He will build a *house* for my name, and I will make his *dynasty permanent*... **7:16** Your *house* and your *kingdom* will stand before me *permanently*; your *dynasty will be permanent.*”<sup>50</sup>

### 2D. Psalm 89:29

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

I will give him an *eternal* dynasty, and make his throne as enduring as the skies above.<sup>51</sup>

### 3D. Acts 13:32-33

**13:32** And we proclaim to you the good news about the promise to our ancestors, **13:33** that this promise God has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘*You are my Son; today I have fathered you.*’<sup>52</sup>

## 4C. The New Covenant

The Israelites, and all men by extension (cf. Romans 3:19-20), are completely unable to keep God’s holy Law. The Mosaic covenant did not answer the question of sin once and for all. Therefore, God established a new and different covenant with his people. In this covenant, often referred to as the new covenant, God promises to do several things, including forgive sin, write his law on the heart of his people, put his Spirit in our hearts, and abide with us as his people forever. This is the way in which he will fulfill his promise to Abraham that he would bless the world through him.<sup>53</sup>

### 1D. Jeremiah 31:31-34

**31:31** “Indeed, a time is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a *new covenant* with the people of Israel and Judah. **31:32** It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. For they violated that agreement, even though I was a faithful husband to them,” says the LORD. **31:33** “But I will make a *new covenant* with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,” says the LORD. “I will put *my law within them* and write it on their hearts and minds. *And I will be their God and they will be my people.* **31:34** “People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. That is because all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,” says the LORD. “All of this is based on the fact that *I will forgive their sin* and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done.”<sup>54</sup>

### 2D. Ezekiel 26:26-27

**36:26** I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

heart of flesh. **36:27** I will *put my spirit within you*, and I will make you walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances, and you will do them.<sup>55</sup>

### 3B. Our Triune God and the Great Commission

*In light of New Testament revelation*, we now know that it was the *Triune* God who was at work in the life of Abraham, promising blessing to the ends of the earth. We know that it was He who chose David as His king and the vehicle through which He would bless his people. We also know that it was He who promised his Spirit as the One who would regenerate His people, sanctify them, and equip them for His service. All along it has been the divine community working out His plan for the world. And now we too are called to know the Father, through the Son, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The God who promises to bless the ends of the earth is a Trinity and we have come to know him as such. And, it is in His Trinitarian name that we have been commissioned to go out and be His instruments for the fulfillment of his plan of blessing, i.e., the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). We make disciples “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We are thus sent out to establish a community on earth after the fashion of the divine community in heaven.<sup>56</sup>

### Summary

In summary of this Chapter, the area of Discipleship has been examined within the context of Historical, Theological and Biblical perspectives. The use of Small Groups as a method of experiencing Discipleship was seen both historically and scripturally. Through scripture discipleship, as God’s plan for the church, is the way he has ordained to bring the blessing promised to Abraham to the world. He has given us a permanent king in the Lord Jesus who has bestowed on us the Spirit. Through the Spirit we are transformed into the image of Christ, grow in our commitment to personal discipleship, and are empowered to love, serve, and disciple others—even the nations.

Jesus' bond with the twelve disciples as seen in John's Gospel, and particularly in the farewell discourse, demonstrates the key elements of a discipleship relationship.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

Presented in the group dynamic of the discourse, was instruction, encouragement, purpose, validation, and trust. The disciples were entrusted with the spiritual care of the lost and those seeking to be saved. This message is rooted in the presence of each covenant initiated by God from the Triune's creation of man to the ascension of Christ the "Son of Man".

Today as individuals and groups who are committed to the cause of spiritual growth and maturity through discipleship; the great commission continues to live on. Let us go therefore and Make disciples.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

The Discipleship Model was created to assess the effect of a discipleship curriculum on designated small groups within the Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church by introducing the groups to tools that would assist the groups in developing a positive attitude towards discipleship. The result of the model being implemented was a measurable change in the group's knowledge of discipleship and its significance in helping members to develop their own spiritual maturity as God became the focus of their relationship.

The methodology used in this project started by identifying the problem. The problem was identified within the point of synergy between the writer's personal experience and the experiences of the persons in the ministry context. The writer observed that he did not participate in any discipleship training or curriculum during his own developmental years, and this did affect his understanding of the need for the formation of his own faith as a component in developing spiritual maturity. As a Pastor who ministers to people and leads groups of various sizes, it became necessary for the writer to develop a discipleship model for small groups to use in the ministry context. Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church has not provided any training to its members in the area of discipleship. The writer Interviewed fellow Pastors of congregations located in close proximity; within a 5 miles radius of the church. During the course of the interviews, the writer discovered that none of the churches in the immediate area were currently offering discipleship classes. It was a combination of these factors, the writer's life experience, the

context of ministry, and the need for this type of training for the Christian community of churches that helped to form the conclusion that a discipleship group curriculum was considered necessary to address the problem of an absence of training in the area of, spiritual growth and faith formation.

The writer's next step as a part of the methodology was to research and present the literature relevant to the issues of discipleship, spiritual growth and faith formation in small groups. The literature confirmed that possible solutions for dealing with the problem involved leading groups through a training process. The training process could be undertaken using several different methods. The potential existed for Mentor to Mentee training, congregation wide mass member training, developing a new discipleship ministry for the Church, or by the use of preexisting small groups. The writer visualized a process that would allow participants to not just learn a definition of discipleship but that participants would come away from the training equipped with tools that would allow them to live as disciples actively pursuing spiritual maturity moving forward.

The writer chose the small groups method to train the participants and to equip them with the tools to continue developing spiritually. The writer selected the small groups approach to discipleship training for two reasons. First, the use of small groups within the local context of Marvin AME Zion was already a method that the membership was accustomed to. Marvin's ministries are more often than not organized into small group settings for example the Class Leader system, the Steward Board, Trustee Board, Christian Education department, Women's Home and Overseas Society. Each of these clubs boards and departments are examples of pre-existing small groups functioning within the local context.

Second, the thought was to move groups from being focused on one subject matter to having a more inclusive outlook as it pertains to the role of discipleship when it is incorporated into the subject matter of each Group. The goal of the project was to develop spiritually mature members within each group as they grew in their understanding of discipleship. Spiritually mature members raise the level of effectiveness in groups that are charged with serving their fellow congregants, the community, and Christ.

The next step in the process was to select the methodological approach that would be most appropriate for this project. A qualitative research method was chosen to move forward with the project. In his book, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, John Creswell, states that qualitative research must meet certain characteristics which are *natural setting, writer as key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meaning, emergent design, theoretical lens, interpretive, and holistic account*.<sup>1</sup> The Discipleship Project has several of these characteristics. The writer gathered data and observed the participating groups during the course of their scheduled meetings. Over the length of the project the writer had occasion to interact with each participating group frequently. In addition, the writer served as the project's key instrument, data collection and examination, documenting observed behavior, and holding group interviews. The Discipleship Project gathered data from many different sources during various phases of the project. Surveys were used, along with a historical assessment. The writer received data from focus groups, and from interviews. During the group interviews, a protocol was established comprised of a prayer

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design : Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2009), 175-176.

given by one of the participating group members, and centering moment which involved group members having an opportunity to share what is currently happening in their lives. The writer then engaged the group participants with questions determined by the current Phase of the project they were involved in. Each of the interview sessions concluded with time provided for questions, remarks, and ended with prayer from another group participant. The writer used context associates to document all interview responses. Data was gathered through training sessions, a video was used to collect information, along with questionnaires and writer's observations during each phase of the project.

The writer maintained all data collected from each group with the aid of a context associate. While research played an important role in developing opinions about discipleship and spiritual maturity, the researcher's objective was to gain insight into the participating group's attitudes concerning discipleship and spiritual maturity. This project's research design would be classified as emergent. During the initial stages of collecting data, the writer recalls that he began the project with the assumption that all information could be gathered from the focus group process. It became obvious to the writer after entering into the data collection phase that certain data would be more conducive in the form of group by group interaction rather than having one large mass meeting. Meaning that rather than having all of the groups meet at one time, data collection would be improved if the writer interacted with the groups separately. Through the use of interviews with individual members of each group information became available that otherwise might not have been represented. Incorporating this method allowed the writer to design materials that will provide this additional information.

By using pre-test and post-test questionnaires, along with observations by the reader in his interactions with the groups participants in both the focus groups and in individual discussions, interviews and other forms of data collected, the reader has selected the appropriate instruments to measure improvement in attitudes towards discipleship and spiritual maturity teaching.

Using a theoretical lens, the reader evaluated the local context of ministry, Marvin AME Zion church. researching the church from the following perspectives, culturally, historically, and socially. This writer's interpretation of data was impacted by what he observed, listened to, and discovered during his interaction with the groups and the local church. These factors qualify the project as an interpretive study as well.

The Discipleship Project was carried out in a phased approach. Once the phases involved in the project were appropriately designed, the writer's next step was to form a hypothesis. The writer suggested in his hypothesis that upon the completion of this project the data would reveal a measurable increase in positive attitudes of the group members towards the subject of discipleship and spiritual maturity. At no time did the writer believe that there would be any decreases in measurable responses from the pretest to the post test for any participating group. The integrity of the responses to the pre-and post tests was maintained by the process by which all gathered data was managed.

The Discipleship Project implemented a case study approach as a qualitative strategy. The writer examined in detail the teaching methods of participating groups over a period of time and the attitudes correlating to the teaching.

Data collection process was maintained over a period of six weeks. This data was instrumental in providing perspective regarding the initial issue. The selection process for

choosing participating groups was to first, identify groups who had requested training material and resources for its members that needed help in their spiritual lives, and second, groups who demonstrated some form of lacking spiritual maturity in their local church context, and last, Groups who just wanted the tools to improve their Group. This final group did not report or were not viewed as having any major group issues.

Data reporting and analysis for the project was completed in three stages. Stage one presented each group by sharing demographic information and a record of the group's history. Stage two provided the data from each of the phases. This included writer's observations, each group's data and their experiences as they were recorded in each phase of the project, and the writer's analysis of the phases. In the final stage, the writer performed analysis of the completed project by examining pre and post surveys of each group. The writer's final analysis will reveal the validity of the initial hypothesis and the resulting conclusion derived from the measurable change in the pre and post survey results.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FIELD EXPERIENCE

#### Introduction

The Writer introduced the Discipleship project to the ministry context, Marvin AME Zion Church, at the conclusion of a Sunday morning worship service. The writer provided a brief synopsis of the project and its objectives. Over the next four weeks, the writer attended the monthly meetings of three ministry groups within the local church context. These ministries were the Financial Focus Group (FFG), the Membership Retention team (MRT), and the Health Ministry. Later in this chapter the writer will provide a historical narrative prepared by each group leader on the origin, purpose, and activity of their respective groups. This is being provided so that the reader will become acquainted with each group.

During the first monthly ministry meetings that followed the Project announcement, the writer shared his own personal story as he met with each group. He emphasized how important group learning had been as a former layperson himself. Now as a Pastor, the writer shared how the impact of not having any Discipleship training during his youth and teen years led at times to personal struggles. There were moments particularly as a youth/teen when the writer was conflicted with mixed feelings and grappled with understanding how to process what was happening during certain chapters of his life. Questions went unanswered in the readers life early on. What was the role of God in the reader's life? What was the reader's role as a Christian Believer in relationship with God? At times early in his life the writer operated with an unclear view of his role and responsibility as a believer. As a child the writer developed a personal

belief system that portrayed God as a mythical granter of wishes, and Heavenly Father who sat in Heaven watching over him and intervening periodically as life got too hard for him to bear. As innocent as this was for a child, the writer had not developed a sense of how one was expected to live and become spiritually mature.

The writer also shared with the group that he had a strong desire to create a curriculum in the church that would help members of Marvin to increase their understanding of the importance of Discipleship as a part of their spiritual development. The reader presented the framework of the Discipleship Project, and discussed the phases involved in the process and the expected conclusion of each. There was significant emphasis placed on the group's commitment to complete the project, which consisted of seminars, sermon series, focus group interaction, workshops and other forms of interaction and data collection. As the initial meeting with each ministry group drew to a close, the writer reserved time for a question and answer segment followed by the writer's encouragement of the MRT, FFG, and Health Ministry members to consent to becoming the first groups to complete the Discipleship project.

The Discipleship project consisted of three separate groups operating as ministries of Marvin AME Zion Church. Each group represented a specific subject matter that was unique to the church. The groups were created to provide a social point of contact for members who shared common interest either through, background, career, skill set, or personal interest, and ultimately as an area that could potentially provide knowledge from group members that could benefit the church. The benefit has been observed as many of Marvin's members have been educated by attending the various workshops, seminars, and special events all held at the church.

The writer asked each of the Leaders of the ministries involved in the Discipleship Project to write a Historical Summary of their ministry, and to guide the reader through the formation, purpose/mission, and activity of their respective group. Listed below are the three groups that consented to participate in the Project.

**Group One: *Health Ministry (HM)***

I attended Marvin AME Zion Church for almost two years before I joined. I had been a trustee, vice president of the usher board and did a monthly "Health Moment" talk at the church I previously attended. I wanted to observe Marvin before I joined and I wasn't sure what my spiritual gift was. I'm a pharmacist and I thought it would be good if Marvin offered something to promote healthy living to the congregation. To my surprise, Pastor Anderson put an announcement in the church bulletin about a healthcare professionals meeting. I became really excited about the idea and attended that first meeting on October, 15th, 2009. Pastor Anderson moderated the first meeting and also the following meeting on November 12th. He outlined his vision for a health care ministry at Marvin. After that, the healthcare professionals took over and had our very first meeting January 2010. I was elected president and am now entering my fourth year as president.

The first thing we did was a church survey to determine what the congregation wanted from a health ministry. We also decided to follow the National Health Observance calendar to do monthly themes. These topics are part of our church bulletin and we also use a bulletin board at church to add other helpful information. We've sponsored health fairs, blood drives, flu clinics, "Biggest Loser" weight-loss contests, an "Ask the Professional" series. We've also had speakers come talk about breast cancer awareness, eating smart at home and a physician speaking about heart health. We got the church to approve the purchase of three wheelchairs, two AED's and two first-aid kits. We also instituted a first-aid station.

Marvin just got approved as a "Fit Friendly" church by the American Heart Association. This is a national and local recognition.

We were approved because our pastor approves of activities in our church that encourages physical fitness such as: smoke-free facility, Exercise classes, "Biggest Loser weight challenge", gymnasium walking track, kitchen committee offering of healthy food choices, youth spiritual dance, pedometers to members, exercise equipment, basketball games, health eating recipe cookbooks and more.

I have truly enjoyed being a part of this ministry.  
 Joseph Thomas, R.Ph.  
 President

## Group 2: The Financial Focus Group (FFG)

Walking In Your Destiny Symposium was held on Saturday, September 20, 2008 with five guest speakers from the following organizations: Wealth Builders, Inc, Queen City Tax Services, Edward Jones, Mechanics Farmers Bank and Small Business Administration that was spearheaded by Sister Brenda V. Harris who is a clergy member on staff at Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church. There was a high request from parishioners and community members who wanted to learn more about how to begin their own businesses, from people who own their businesses and what are the “best business practices” from an educational perspective that had the potential of assisting them in getting started.

There were on this particular event on September 20, 2008, based on the registration numbers, fifty participants that enrolled. The demographics of the participants were males, females, first time business owners, married, singles, divorces and the age group from the range of late 20's to early 50's that wanted the knowledge and the understanding of the business side of beginning their own business but wanted to understand the complete business cycle developing a business proposal to getting the approval from the financial institution.

The feedback was overwhelmingly supported based on the evaluation tool that was requested for the participants to complete. The feedback indicated that they wanted to see more in the future, they shared that the guest speakers' experiences were realistic and honest, and the symposium exceeded their expectations and they cannot wait for future ones to follow.

Based on the September 20, 2008 Walking In Your Destiny Symposium, The Financial Focus Group was initiated in January 2009. This particular group currently consists of members who have an expertise in the following financial areas: investment banking, estate planning, life insurance, brokerage planning, financial project management, financial consulting and portfolio investments.

The Financial Focus Group is very sensitive to meeting the needs of the parishioners, which is why this group encourages at the beginning of the fiscal year (August) for the church members to complete the Financial Focus Group Survey (see attachment). This survey helps the focus group in preparation for future empowerment sessions.

The empowerment sessions that have been successfully planned are as follows: Estate Planning, Debt Management, Tax Preparation, Investment Planning and College Savings. Based on the feedback / comments from the participants: “the facilitators used situations that I could completely relate to”, the materials were “user friendly” and “the facilitators provided their business contact information if they had follow up questions” and “I did not feel lost in the sessions, the financial language that the instructor used was at my level of understanding”. When these empowerment sessions are held, which are every 3 months, there are about 15 to 20 participants that register for the free empowerment sessions.

To continue to educate the parishioners from a financial perspective, we have “Did You Knows? (see attachment) that is inserted weekly in the church bulletin that provides different “financial fun facts” for everyone to be educated on.

Group 3: Marvin AME Zion  
Membership Retention Team

I am providing this narrative at the request of Pastor Haven O. Anderson in connection with his Doctoral Dissertation. My name is Gerald K. Mayfield. I have been a member of Marvin AME Zion (Marvin) for approximately four years. I have been a member of Marvin AME Zion's Membership Retention Team (MRT) since November of 2011 and chairperson of the MRT since September of 2012.

The MRT's mission is to assist the members of Marvin to be become actively involved in all aspects of church life. This will allow all members of Marvin to use their spiritual gifts in the service of building up God's kingdom. The MRT's purpose is to design ways to help keep membership utilized, engaged and retained. This will foster a sense of belonging for our membership.

The MRT is not a highly visible group however it is extremely active. Since its creation in 2011 by Pastor Anderson, the MRT has undertaken or participated in the following initiatives designed to accomplish the MRT mission and purpose:

- *New Members Class*: a member of the MRT attends each new members class to serve as a resource to each new member regarding Marvin's various ministries as they become oriented to Marvin and consider participation in such ministries.
- *New Member Survey*: the MRT developed a new members' survey that is completed by each new member at the conclusion of new members class in an effort to become familiar with the new members interests and needs, facilitate communication between such member and ministries of interest and to alert Pastor Anderson of new member special needs.
- *Spiritual Gifts Class*: Serve as liaison between Pastor Anderson and Marvin's spiritual gifts class. At the conclusion of each spiritual gifts class the MRT reviews spiritual gifts data to assist Pastor Anderson in identifying class graduates that possess spiritual gifts that are needed for Marvin's various ministries.
- *Ministry Fair*: Over the last several years, Marvin has held a ministry fair designed to provide information to members regarding Marvin's various ministries to assist members as they consider participation in one of Marvin's ministries. It is anticipated that the MRT may assist with the coordination of future ministry fairs.
- *Ministry Connection*: the MRT facilitates communication between Marvin ministry leaders and members interested in their respective ministries.
- *Church-wide Survey*: the MRT developed and administered the first church-wide survey under Pastor Anderson. The survey was administered in 2012. MRT collected, compiled and provided Pastor Anderson with survey results. It is anticipated that the church-wide survey will be administered periodically in an effort to provide Pastor Anderson with information regarding members' assessment of Marvin and for his use in considering initiatives to enhance the Marvin experience.

The MRT is currently undertaking a project to collect certain demographic information from each Marvin member to be maintained in Marvin's membership database. Please find attached the demographic information that will be collected in connection with this project (Attachment 1). Every person joining Marvin will be asked to provide such information as well. It is expected that such information will be used by Pastor Anderson and church staff in a number a ways, including by not limited to the following: (i) resource for comprehensive demographic information on each member to enhance familiarization with each member, (ii) identification of members with occupational or vocational experience in areas of which Marvin may need help (i.e., CPA to conduct church audit, facilities management experience to manage Marvin's new worship/gym facility, educators to assist with the development of Marvin's education department), (iii) tool for matching of spiritual gifts and talents to ministries that require such spiritual gifts and talents, and (iv) resource for talent identification for open ministry leadership positions. I wholeheartedly believe that this project is in keeping with 1 Corinthians 12 in that the church like the body is made up of many members (parts) and that the church (body) can only fully function if each member (part) knows his or her God given role with respect to the church (body). This project will help Marvin identify each hand, ear and eye that attends Marvin and use those hands, ears and eyes in the service of building God's kingdom.

I am proud of the service that the MRT has provided Marvin during its short tenure. I am equally excited about its future. I affectionately refer to the MRT as Pastor Anderson's "SWAT team" because I regard the MRT as Pastor's special operations team designed to undertake projects or missions that the Pastor deems critical to mission of the church.

Churches are challenged to create an environment that provides its members and individuals seeking a spiritual home with a community that fulfills their needs. Churches must not be monolithic in their response to the needs of its membership. The church, while being universal, must meet the specific, particularized needs of its membership. In doing so, churches must design strategies and techniques, such as membership retention teams, to assess the needs of its membership and promptly respond to such needs. The MRT or similarly designed strategies are integral to ensuring that Marvin and churches fully utilize, engage and retain its membership. A healthy and fully engaged church membership serves as a beacon to individuals seeking God and those that do not know God. I am thankful that God inspired Pastor Anderson to implement a membership retention team at Marvin AME Zion.

Gerry Mayfield  
President, Membership Retention Team, (MRT)

## Discipleship Seminars

After creating and distributing a survey to the three groups: FFG, Health Ministry, and MRT, the writer used the data collected to design and facilitate four seminars that concentrated on: *The Meaning, the Need, the Call and the Lifestyle of Discipleship*.

*Seminar 1. "What is Discipleship?"*

This seminar defines the meaning of Discipleship for group participants. The groups engage in dialogue and respond to the question of what is a Disciple? Who is qualified to become a disciple, where can disciples be found today? When is a person deemed ready to become a disciple? How does a person become a Disciple?

*Seminar 2. "The Need for Discipleship"*

This seminar provided group members with an understanding of why discipleship is needed as the need relates to the local church, the church community and evangelistically. The role discipleship plays in the life of a believer.

*Seminar 3. "The Call to Become a Disciple"*

This seminar explores the universal call placed upon all who confess Jesus Christ as their personal savior to become members of the body of Christ, and to become Disciples themselves. The group explores its ability to impact the call to Discipleship on internal members within the group and on members of the ministry context.

*Seminar 4. "The Discipleship Life"*

This seminar focused on developing and maintaining the lifestyle of a disciple. During this stage, group members are challenged to commit to their own

spiritual growth and maturity in their Christian Walk. The members of the group are challenged during this seminar to reevaluate their group mission statements to determine whether their objectives are consistent with promoting their service as a form of discipleship.

#### The Workshop Series

The workshop experience was designed to complement the four seminars that were attended by the groups participating in the Discipleship project. The goal of the workshops was to provide an interactive environment where Seminar participants were able to experience role playing and take part in group discussions about the positive and negatives of merging Discipleship material with the subject matter of their respective groups.

#### The Sermon Series

The three part Sermon series was designed to integrate the Sunday Morning Worship experience and the sermon with the topic of discipleship. During the project, the writer led the congregation through a 3 week consecutive series. The series was titled "The Great Commission is still the Great Call of the Church. The scripture used as foundation for the series was The Gospel of Matthew 28<sup>th</sup> Chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFELECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In this final chapter the writer turns his attention to final reflections summarizations and an overall conclusion concerning the project. As he pauses to reflect on the attitude and spirit of the Marvin AME Zion church prior to the creation of the discipleship project the writer remembered that while there had always been a friendly and welcoming presence concerning the church, there were no consistent vehicles in place to help the groups and ministries within the church context to develop spiritual maturity through teaching discipleship principles. Based on the results of the research the writer contends that a discipleship project was needed at Marvin and proved beneficial in improving the attitudes of members towards discipleship as a lifestyle.

At the beginning of this Doctor of Ministry program, the writer did not know how much this project would have a positive impact on himself personally. Going through the Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary, has been liberating. Because of the process involved in completing the project and course requirements, the writer gained the courage to address things about himself that he had not previously dealt with. He has been able to experience first-hand, peer relationships through the cohort interaction that pushed the writer and challenged him to do more and to raise his own level of expectation within himself and his ministry. The Doctor of ministry program has given the writer a confidence and trust in his own capabilities, and being equipped with

the tools that will aid him in carrying out the ministries he has been called by God to serve in the church and within himself.

The writer concedes that while engaging the material and preparing the resources for the groups from Marvin who completed the discipleship project, that he has received personal benefit from the core teachings of the project as well. The writer acknowledges that even though he was Pastoring a church with a growing membership and Sunday worship services that others described as exciting; internally he was experiencing burnout and going through a spiritual lull. The writer had become fatigued by overextending himself through service and activity. He served as pastor of his local church, while also serving as either chairman or participating member of ten different clubs boards and departments at various levels within his denomination; These responsibilities have kept the writer busy, but have not by themselves enhanced his spiritual walk nor his responsiveness to Discipleship.

During the phase of the writer's coursework when the spiritual autobiography was completed, the writer addressed issues from his past that he struggled with. He recounted how his involvement with group activities and events allowed him to experience a sense of fellowship and comfort in being around other people. The spiritual autobiography process provided the writer an opportunity to examine how he has made it through the challenges of his youth were there was no plan to develop the spiritual side of his life. During his young adult life when he was living on his own. The writer attended church and accepted that this was an important relationship throughout his life. But even now the writer concedes church could have been so much more of an instrument in helping

develop his life had he understood the benefit of following a discipleship model such as the one that he has designed.

Once the writer examined the pretest responses of group participants, and began interacting with the three groups during the Testing and Research phase of the Discipleship project, the writer discovered that a surprising number of group participants at Marvin had a narrowly defined view of Discipleship and those who would be considered disciples today in the church. Their common discipleship references were most often attributed specifically to clergy and rarely to laypersons. The overwhelming majority of group participants did not see a direct correlation between Discipleship as a lifestyle and their respective ministry programs.

Post-test data collected and analyzed in comparison to the earlier documented pretest reflected a measurable shift in attitudes of group participants following their project involvement. The shift signified an increase in favorable responses by group participants. After experiencing the Discipleship Project's seminars, workshops, Sermon series and other resources, the responses from group participants now reflects a stronger indication that laypersons can be identified as Disciples.

During the field experience, the writer was able to interact with group participants and build a rapport with them. As the writer taught the seminar series he became a participant, the occasion presented itself to allow further personal disclosure of his life and background. The writer was able to freely share his own strong feeling of care and concern for the local church and provided insight to the lifelong feeling that he has grown up with, explaining to the group that he believes the it was God who has made him sensitive to people who are in need.

The writer received insight from the interactive portions of the field experience. Because of the open and secure atmosphere created by the activities, all participants were encouraged to be transparent in sharing, and receptive to feedback from the group, and the material.

As the project progressed from the first Seminar through the final one, four weeks later, the writer observed an openness and receptivity towards the discipleship discussion, which had not been present at the first session. Group participants appeared to have an increased interest in the discussions and the resources that focused on the personal growth component of the Discipleship project. The personal spiritual growth and maturity that group members commented on emerged from participating in this ministry project. These personal acknowledgments about their spiritual growth and maturity provide support of the writer's initial hypothesis; that group participants who complete the discipleship project would see an improvement in their own spiritual growth and maturity. This in turn would provide more spiritually mature and disciplined people to perform in their respective groups and also the ministry context.

It is the writer's recommendation that in order for the culture of the Marvin AME Zion church to embrace discipleship as one of its core responsibilities, that there should be an ongoing process of discipleship instituted within the church structure. Teaching discipleship in a small group setting is the writer's best suggestion for this project to be embraced by the entire church. The writer also recommends that the discipleship project be incorporated with the new members training class. This would present the presence of discipleship into the expectations of each new member as they learn about Marvin and its history, and its involvement in the community. The discipleship project has the potential

to be used in any local church context were the membership was large enough to contain small groups. While the infrastructure of the AME Zion church is already used to operating with small groups, this project can be completed and be very effective in other ecumenical settings.

The writer has spoken to his Presiding Elder concerning the discipleship project, and the presiding Elder has expressed interest in using the project as a model that can be implemented district wide. This means that this project can in the very near future serve as a model for the twenty churches that comprise the Wadesboro Monroe District of the West Central North Carolina Conference, of the AME Zion church.

**APPENDIX A**

**PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEYS**

## **Marvin AME Zion Church Small Group Discipleship Pre- Project Survey**

1. Have you attended a course on Discipleship training before?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is it your desire to learn more about Discipleship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

3. What most concerns you about attending a class on Discipleship? (check all that apply)

Length of Course training \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Schedule \_\_\_\_\_ Commitment \_\_\_\_\_  
 Personal Interest \_\_\_\_\_ Biblical Knowledge \_\_\_\_\_

List other concerns

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4. Which of the following types of Training are you most familiar with?

Class Room/Lecture \_\_\_\_\_ One on One \_\_\_\_\_ Group Discussion \_\_\_\_\_  
 Video Modules \_\_\_\_\_ Internet /On Line \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you believe there is any connection between your church group and Discipleship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

6. Rate your knowledge of Discipleship as an area of ministry.

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

7. Who is Responsible for Discipleship Occurring?

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8. Rate your knowledge of the requirements to become a Disciple.

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

9. Rate your knowledge concerning Discipleship towards others (Making others a Disciple).

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

10. Rate your knowledge of the what is involved in a lifestyle of Discipleship

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

## Marvin AME Zion Church Small Group Discipleship Pre- Project Survey

1. Have you attended a course on Discipleship training before?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is it your desire to learn more about Discipleship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

3. What most concerns you about attending a class on Discipleship? (check all that apply)

Length of Course training \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Schedule \_\_\_\_\_ Commitment \_\_\_\_\_  
 Personal Interest \_\_\_\_\_ Biblical Knowledge \_\_\_\_\_

List other concerns

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4. Which of the following types of Training are you most familiar with?

Class Room/Lecture \_\_\_\_\_ One on One \_\_\_\_\_ Group Discussion \_\_\_\_\_  
 Video Modules \_\_\_\_\_ Internet /On Line \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you believe there is any connection between your church group and Discipleship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

6. Rate your knowledge of Discipleship as an area of ministry.

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

7. Who is Responsible for Discipleship Occurring?

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8. Rate your knowledge of the requirements to become a Disciple.

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

9. Rate your knowledge concerning Discipleship towards others (Making others a Disciple).

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

10. Rate your knowledge of the what is involved in a lifestyle of Discipleship

Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Strong \_\_\_\_\_ Very Strong \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

**PRE AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY RESULTS**

**Marvin AME Zion Church Small Group Discipleship Pre- Project Survey**  
 30 Respondents Participated in the Pre and Post Survey

1. Have you attended a course on Discipleship training before?

Yes 2 No 28

2. Is it your desire to learn more about Discipleship?

Yes 13 No 17

3. What most concerns you about attending a class on Discipleship? (check all that apply)

Length of Course training 15 Personal Schedule 8  
 Commitment 20 Personal Interest 12 Biblical Knowledge 18

List other concerns \_What will be required/expected of me after I take this class  
 18 Resp.\_

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4. Which of the following types of Training are you familiar with?

Class Room/Lecture 30 One on One 30 Group Discussion 30  
 Video Modules 19 Internet /On Line 5

5. Do you believe there is any connection between your church group and Discipleship?

Yes 7 No 23

6. Rate your knowledge of Discipleship as an area of ministry.

Poor 9 Fair 18 Strong 3 Very Strong           

7. Who is Responsible for Discipleship Occurring?

Pastor/Clergy 25, Christian Education 3, Church/Members 3

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8. Rate your knowledge of the requirements to become a Disciple.

Poor 22 Fair 7 Strong 1 Very Strong

9. Rate your knowledge concerning Discipleship towards others (Making others a Disciple).

Poor 22 Fair 8 Strong        Very Strong       

10. Rate your knowledge of the what is involved in a lifestyle of Discipleship

Poor 20 Fair 8 Strong        Very Strong

**Marvin AME Zion Church Small Group Discipleship Post- Project Survey Results**  
 30 Surveys Completed for Pre and Post Project.

1. Have you attended a course on Discipleship training before?

Yes 30 No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is it your desire to learn more about Discipleship?

Yes 23 No 7 \_\_\_\_\_

3. What most concerns you about attending a class on Discipleship? (check all that apply)

Length of Course training    Personal Schedule    Commitment    Personal Interest    Biblical Knowledge   

other concerns    (*There were no documented responses to this question in the Post test*) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which of the following types of Training are you familiar with?

Class Room/Lecture (30 Resp.) One on One (30 Resp.) Group Discussion (30 Resp.)   Video Modules (30 Resp.) Internet /On Line (5 Resp.)

5. Do you believe there is any connection between your church group and Discipleship?

Yes (28 Resp.) No (2 Resp.) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Rate your knowledge of Discipleship as an area of ministry.

Poor (0 Resp.) Fair (18 Resp.) Strong (11 Resp.) Very Strong (1 resp.)

7. Who is Responsible for Discipleship Occurring?

Pastor/Clergy (25 Resp.) Christian Education (3 Resp.)  
 the Church/Members (3 Resp.) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Rate your knowledge of the requirements to become a Disciple.

Poor (0 Resp.) Fair (18 Resp.) Strong (11 Resp.) Very Strong (1 Resp.)

9. Rate your knowledge concerning Discipleship towards others (Making others a Disciple).

Poor\_(0 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Fair\_(18 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Strong\_(12 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Very Strong\_\_\_\_\_

10. Rate your knowledge of what is involved in maintaining a lifestyle of Discipleship

Poor\_(0 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Fair\_(18 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Strong\_(11 Resp.)\_\_\_\_ Very Strong\_(1 Resp.)\_\_\_\_\_



### Church Survey

*Please complete the following survey and return it by mail to Marvin A.M.E Zion or deposit in the survey box located in the vestibule of the church no later than Sunday.,*

#### MARVIN AME ZION CHURCH SURVEY

1) I have been attending Marvin for \_\_\_\_\_ years? (please circle)

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1 to 5 years
- c. 5 to 10 years
- d. Greater than 10 years

If I could change one thing at Marvin it would be: \_\_\_\_\_

2) I attend the (8am/11am) \_\_\_\_\_ worship service at Marvin. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

I prefer this worship service (Yes/No)? \_\_\_\_\_ or I would prefer a service at \_\_\_\_\_

3) How often do you attend service at Marvin? (please circle)

- a. 3 to 4 times a month
- b. 1 to 2 times a month
- c. Less than 12 times a year
- d. Special occasions (Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day)

4) Are you an active member of Marvin (Yes/No)? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, describe your involvement.

If not what would help you become more active \_\_\_\_\_

5) I attend \_\_\_\_\_ Bible study at Marvin (for example: noon day, women's, men's, family). I would attend more if this type of class was added (for example: single's)

6) What ministry at Marvin contributes the most to your spiritual growth? \_\_\_\_\_

7) I have \_\_\_\_\_ (please indicate how many) children attending Marvin. I would like Marvin to add the following activity or program for children \_\_\_\_\_

8) What additional activities or programs would you like to see at Marvin? \_\_\_\_\_

9) Would you recommend Marvin to other people in the community (Yes/No)? \_\_\_\_\_ If "no", why not?

10) Do you think you have a role in making Marvin a place where any member of the community would go in times of need, be it spiritual or otherwise? If so, please state \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing the survey!

## Attachment 1

## MRT

## Demographic Data Points

## CATEGORIES

- CHILDREN
  - ✓ Names
  - ✓ DOB
  - ✓ Grade level
  - ✓ School attending
- EDUCATION
  - ✓ High School
  - ✓ Some College
  - ✓ Associate's Degree
  - ✓ Bachelor's Degree
  - ✓ Master's Degree
  - ✓ Doctoral Degree
  - ✓ Other
- JOB POSITION/TITLE/OCCUPATION
- SKILLS
  - (Example: computer, typing, event planning, coaching)
- SPECIAL INTEREST/HOBBIES
  - (Example: singing, dancing, acting, golf, and basketball)
- AFFILIATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS/CIVIC/ CLUBS
  - (Example: school board, Rotary Club, Big Brothers, NAACP, sorority)
- SPIRITUAL GIFTS
- MEMBERSHIP
  - ✓ Membership Status:  Probation  Full Connection
  - ✓ Year of membership
  - ✓ New to AME Zion
  - ✓ Transfer
  - ✓ New to Area
- MILITARY
  - ✓ Active
  - ✓ Veteran
  - ✓ Branch of service
- LANGUAGES
- Current and Prior Ministry Service or Board Experience
  - (Example: Choir, Sunday School Teacher, Stewardess)

## Membership Retention Team (MRT)

## New Member Class Survey

- 1) What led you to become a member of Marvin A.M.E. Zion Church?
  
- 2) Are you aware of the various ministries in which you can serve? If so, on which ministry/ministries do you currently serve?
  
- 3) In which of the following do you participate on a regular basis?
  - a) Men's/Women's Bible Study
  - b) General Bible Study/Spiritual Gifts Class
  - c) Noon Day Bible Study
  - d) Sunday School
  - e) None of the above
  
- 4) If you have children, are they currently involved in any ministries at Marvin, and do they attend youth bible study or Sunday school regularly?
  
- 5) If you are not currently active on any ministries at Marvin, are you content with your level of involvement and why?
  
- 6) How can Marvin better serve your spiritual needs?
  
- 7) How likely are you to recommend Marvin to a co-worker/neighbor/friend or family member?
  
- 8) Do you feel a personal connection to Marvin and why?

Name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Financial Focus Group Mission & Vision Statement:

To equip the body of Christ to follow God's financial principles, to become better stewards of the financial resources in their possession and to use those resources to bring glory to God.

What are your current financial goals (check all that apply)?:

- Prepare for retirement
- Pay less in taxes
- Pay off debts
- Save for a major purchase (home, boat, etc.)
- Accumulate a cash reserve (emergency fund)
- Build a long-term investment strategy
- Preserve capital
- Provide care for parents
- Provide for nursing home expenses
- Protect income if I am disabled
- Plan for an expected inheritance
- Leave a legacy for my heirs
- Develop philanthropic strategy
- Provide income for survivors (review life insurance coverage)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

• In which of the following age groups do you belong:  
 18-29    30-39    40-49    50-59    60-69    70-79    80+

• Do you have minor children?    Yes    No

• Do you have minor grand-children?    Yes    No

• What is your marital status? \_\_\_\_\_

• Are you retired?    Yes    No

• What is/was your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

• Are you participating in your employer's retirement plan?    Yes    No

Please complete and return to any member on the Financial Focus Group

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